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**THE FORCED REPATRIATION OF SOVIET CITIZENS:
A STUDY IN MILITARY OBEDIENCE**

by

Donna E. Dismukes

December, 1996

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THE FORCED REPATRIATION OF SOVIET CITIZENS: A STUDY IN MILITARY OBEDIENCE

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requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

On 11 February 1945, at the conclusion of the Yalta Conference, the United States signed a Repatriation Agreement with the USSR. The interpretation of this Agreement resulted in the forcible repatriation of all Soviets "regardless of their wishes." Repatriation operations became scenes of carnage as Soviets fiercely resisted the return to persecution, torture, and in many cases, execution. Military objections to the policy failed to result in its cancellation. This thesis examines the military struggle to find a balance between obedience and moral obligation under extremely difficult conditions. The forced repatriation operations, which took place from 1945 - 1947, stand as a precursor to the new world of peace-keeping and peace-enforcement. These new military missions will undoubtedly bring military personnel face to face with operations of a similarly troubling nature. This study of past events may prove useful for the development of policy for future operations.

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PART I

FORCED REPATRIATION AND ITS EFFECTS

I. INTRODUCTION

> *The forced repatriation of those . . . Russians showed me that in matters of life and death the responsibility of those who take orders is as great as those who give them.*
>
> *Reverend William Sloane Coffin*

A. MILITARY OBEDIENCE

A well-known military maxim states, "The first duty of the soldier is obedience." Yet the horrors of the Nazi regime demonstrated that more than blind obedience is expected from the soldier. During the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunals, Justice Robert H. Jackson declared: "The one who has committed criminal acts may not take refuge in superior orders nor in the doctrine that his crimes were acts of states." As a result of the findings at Nuremberg, the United States military regulations were changed to stipulate that failure to obey an order is a violation of the Uniform Code of Military Justice only if the order is "lawful." The United States Manual for Courts Martials states:

> A general order or regulation is lawful unless it is contrary to the Constitution, the laws of the United States, or lawful superior orders or for some other reason is beyond the authority of the official issuing it.

This extremely broad definition does not offer clear guidance to those military personnel faced with what they may consider to be a questionable order. What *is* clear to the military mind, however, is the message which is reinforced through military training and indoctrination: that military obedience is a functional imperative. Consider the oath taken by enlisted personnel upon entering the service: "I do solemnly swear to . . . obey

the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me . . . ."

In his essay "The Ethics of Leadership I," Malham M. Wakin compares the military oath to the oath of marriage. He defines both as moral commitments. If military obedience is considered by most to be a moral commitment, under what circumstances can military personnel justify disobedience? Wakin explains:

> The ground rules for violating this moral commitment are subject to the same considerations as are relevant to other moral contexts: we are justified in violating one of our moral obligations just when it is in conflict with another, higher obligation and the circumstances are such that we cannot fulfill them both. . . . That there are limits to military obedience can be readily granted; what these limits are is not so easily determined precisely because obedience is so critical to the military function.[1]

Numerous essays have been written about military ethics and military obedience. While the majority of these studies recognize the potential problem of unquestioning obedience, all agree that obedience is critical to military function. Consequently, most authors espouse the belief that fostering unquestioning obedience in the troops is preferable to the risk of promoting an environment in which orders are routinely questioned. Some studies imply that the responsibility for determining the legality or morality of an order rests with the officer community alone. In The Teaching of Ethics in the Military, Air Force Academy Instructor Peter L. Stromberg and his colleagues point out the risks of disobedience:

> Stupidity and incompetence, though they constitute in the military - particularly the military at war the ultimate immorality, may be

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[1] Wakin, Malham M., "The Ethics of Leadership I." In *War, Morality, and the Military Profession,* edited by Malham Wakin, p 189.

> compounded when an order is disobeyed. Disobedience seldom eliminates the source of stupidity; in fact, it delivers to the incompetent commander a weapon for a righteous charge against the disobedient. A subordinate must further recognize that the wrong order may be as justified as any other order, and that it usually comes from a source with superior access to certain information.[2]

Mr. Stromberg's message is one that is clearly understood by all military personnel. It is no secret that disobeying an order is one of the fastest ways to end a career. The aforementioned essays offer numerous cases in which that theory is borne out. Yet to assume that all orders are followed to the letter would be naïve. The soldier quickly learns that there are degrees of obedience - loose interpretation of an order, literal translation of an order, methods of delay, evasion, or various other means by which the soldier can comply to enough of a degree that, in his mind, he has met the obligation to his superior and, at the same time, satisfied his moral conscience.

That is not to say that the decision to disobey an order is embarked upon lightly. Considering the inherent risks of such a decision, one may ask what drives a soldier to refuse to obey an order? How do military personnel react when faced with an order which they believe to be immoral? Are full compliance or total disobedience considered the only two alternatives?

This thesis will explore these questions through the examination of a particularly stark incident in which the United States and British militaries were presented with an order which quickly became very difficult to accept from both a moral and legal

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[2] Toner, James H., ed. *True Faith & Allegiance: the burden of military ethics,* University of Kentucky, 1995

standpoint: the forced repatriation of Soviet citizens by U.S. and British troops at the end of World War II. This policy was widely detested by the military who was forced to carry it out from 1945-1947.

Mass repatriation operations began in May 1945. From May through September, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF) delivered 2,034,000 personnel to the USSR. As a result of the huge scale of the initial operations and the dispatch with which they were carried out, resistance of those returning to the Soviet Union was minimal. However, as the mass confusion abated and word of the horrendous treatment of the returned citizens spread, resistance to repatriation became fierce. Repatriation operations frequently became scenes of carnage. American and British soldiers were shocked and horrified at the sight of prisoners biting into each others' jugular veins, impaling themselves on broken glass, and jumping off of speeding trains as a means of escaping return. The military protested the policy, however its objections were generally ignored and the policy remained in effect.

The struggle of military personnel to find a balance between obedience and moral obligation resulted in a range of responses from all members of the rank and file, from the lowest private to the commanding general. While not prepared to disobey their orders outright, many officers and soldiers obviously decided that they could not, in good conscience, carry out their orders to the letter. Conversely, there were those who did so and remain haunted by their decision to this day. Finally, there were personnel who believed that, although the job was an unpleasant one, orders were orders and their only obligation was to obey.

Those who chose the middle ground developed various methods of allowing for escape. These ploys included adopting a look-the-other-way security posture, repeatedly requesting clarification of orders as a delaying tactic, or forging documentation to register prisoners as non-Soviet citizens, to name a few. As a result of their efforts, it is estimated that 500,000 citizens evaded return to the Soviet Union.

The government documentation which may detail the sum total of methods by which so many refugees evaded repatriation remains classified. Nevertheless, first and second hand accounts indicate that members of the U.S. and British militaries played the major role in the successful escape of these refugees. This thesis will examine the struggle of the military to find a balance between obedience and moral obligation under extremely difficult conditions. It will also examine the means by which the military managed to voice its protest to the policy of forced repatriation in the form of 500,000 escapees. Lastly it will assess the government reaction to this protest.

II. THE BUILD-UP TO FORCED REPATRIATION

. . . if the choice is between hardship to our men and death to Russians our choice is plain.

P.J. Grigg
British Secretary of State for War

On 11 February, 1945, at the conclusion of the Yalta Conference, the United States and Britain signed separate Repatriation Agreements with the USSR. These agreements guaranteed the return of displaced Allied nationals on a reciprocal basis. While neither agreements called for the *forcible* repatriation of Soviet citizens, both the British and U.S. governments interpreted the agreements in this way. In fact forcible repatriation had been carried out by both governments months before the Yalta Agreement was signed.

Most of the British and American soldiers called upon to carry out the initial repatriation operations were led to believe that all the Soviets being repatriated were traitors; after all, the majority of them had been captured in German uniform. It was not until later that the Allied troops would learn the reasons behind these soldiers' service in the German Army. As they came to know the truth their orders became harder to accept.

A. SOVIET SERVICE IN THE REICH

At the end of May 1944, General Eisenhower and his staff received intelligence reports which indicated that large numbers of Soviets under German Command were being sent to man the Atlantic Wall, the western coastline of France which the Allies were

about to attack. On May 28, 1944, Archibald Clark Kerr, British Ambassador in Moscow, wrote to Stalin's Foreign Affairs Commissar informing him of a "large Russian element"[3] that had been forced to serve with the German armies in the west. On behalf of Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF), Kerr requested that Stalin issue a statement promising "amnesty or considerate treatment" to those Russians who surrendered to the Allies "at the first opportunity"[4] The Kremlin responded to this request by denying the fact that any more than a handful of such cases existed and therefore no action need be taken.[5] Soviet authorities gave the same response to Eisenhower when, shortly before D-Day, he requested guidance from the USSR concerning the disposition of Soviet soldiers captured in German uniform.

The truth of the matter was that an estimated three to five million Soviets were in the service of the Reich. They fell into three basic categories: forced laborers, POWs and Soviet defectors.

1. Forced Laborers

The first and largest group of Soviets who fell under the control of Germany were the forced laborers. Estimates of the number of forced laborers deported by the Germans from Russia to work in industry and agriculture range from 3 million to over four million.[6]

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[3] Although Soviet citizens were commonly referred to as Russians, in actuality the majority of those in the West were most likely non-Russians. This was due to the fact that mostly non-Russian areas such as Ukraine, and Belarus were under German occupation during the war. Hereafter when directly citing sources, I will leave the term Russian as it stands in the original.

[4] Bethell, Nicholas. *The Last Secret.* New York: Basic Book, Inc.,1974, p. 2

[5] Ibid., p. 4

[6] Heller, Mikhail and Nekrich, Aleksandr, *Utopia in Power.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992, p. 395

Soon after Operation Barbarossa, Germany took control of large areas of western USSR. Promising good pay and conditions, Germany enticed the Soviets to travel to Germany in search of work. At first the Germans were successful in this effort. Approximately 70,000 Soviets made the move. However, they quickly realized that in Nazi Germany "Slavs" were considered *Untermencsh* and badly exploited by both German authorities and the general population. Hitler summed up the German attitude toward the Soviets in instructions to his staff: "Our guiding principle is that the existence of these people is justified only by their economic exploitation for our benefit." [7]

Subsequently, six months after Germany began to recruit Soviets to work in the Reich, the flow of volunteers dried up. This created a problem for Germany. She was losing men at a phenomenal rate in the campaign against Russia and soon the need for labor in German farms, factories and mines quickly became critical. The Reich's solution to this problem was to resort to the brutal kidnappings of millions of Soviet citizens. Soviet citizens from the age of 10 were transported to Germany via old, unheated railway cars with the doors sealed and windows wired. Often they spent weeks in the railway cars before they reached their destination. Disease, malnutrition and exposure resulted in a high death rate. Within a few months 100,000 captives were returned to the USSR as being too weak to work. They were the fortunate ones.

Those strong enough to work were sent to labor camps where they were ill-fed and maltreated. The least fortunate were sent to concentration camps where they were

[7] Ibid., p. 384

literally worked to death. The conditions for all forced laborers were so wretched that by the end of the war an estimated 750,000 to 800,000 were dead.[8]

2. Prisoners of War

Soviet POWs were quickly recognized as another source of manpower for Germany. Thousands of Soviet POWs were forced to serve in the German Army or in forced labor battalions. During the course of the war, the Germans captured an estimated 5.75 million Red Army soldiers. According to Pawns of Yalta author Mark R. Elliot, "Every fourth Soviet soldier became a German POW."[9]

Immediately after the war broke out Germany contacted the International Red Cross Committee for information on regulating the condition of prisoners on both sides. Although Germany was aware that the Soviet Government no longer considered itself a party to the Hague Conventions (as a result of the Bolshevik *coup d'état*) and that it was not a signatory of the Geneva Convention of 1929, the German Government passed lists of Soviet prisoners to the USSR in accordance with the provision of these conventions in the hopes that the Kremlin would reciprocate. The Soviet Government failed to respond. Hitler then urged Red Cross inspection of camps. The Soviets refused. Germany's efforts to enlist Soviet cooperation in POW matters ended with the USSR's response to the German request for prisoners' postal services:

> There are no Russian prisoners of war. The Russian soldier fights on till death. If he chooses to become a prisoner, he is

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[8] Dallin, Alexander. *German Rule in Russia 1941-1945.* Colorado: Boulder, 1981, p. pp. 451-453

[9] Elliot, Mark R. *Pawns of Yalta: Soviet Refugees and America's Role in Their Repatriation.* Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982, p. 7

> automatically excluded from the Russian community. We are not interested in a postal service only for Germans.[10]

This response made it clear to Hitler that the Soviets had no intention of treating German prisoners of war in accordance with the provisions of the Geneva Convention of 1929. Stalin's decision to wash his hands of his countrymen, as well as his refusal to allow Red Cross support of German POWs, was Hitler's green light to treat the "slavs" as he saw fit. According to Elliot, the resulting inhumane treatment of the Russians by the Germans ranked "among the worst atrocities of a war replete with them."[11] He elaborates:

> The disaster resulted from deliberate, systematic destruction, intentional and unintentional neglect, and the lack of international protection for prisoners on the Eastern front. The Nazis methodically singled out special categories for extinction. The most certain to perish were Communist party members, military commissars, Jews, and the ill-defined category of intellectuals. . . . [The Soviet novelist, Mikhail Sholokhov] describes German screening of Russian POWS: "Three SS officers started picking out the ones among us they thought were dangerous. They asked who were communist, who were officers, who were commissars . . . . some Russians landed in trouble because they were all dark and had curly hair. The SS men just came up to them and said: 'Jude?' The one they asked would say he was a Russian, but they wouldn't even listen. 'Step out!' and that was that. They shot the poor devils." Not only Russians, but darker skinned, circumcised Moslems of Central Asia were mistaken for Jews.[12]

Of the estimated 5,754,000 Soviet prisoners captured by the Germans after 1941, only 1,150,000 are estimated to have survived.[13] Those POWs not shot upon arrival at the camps died either of starvation, lack of protection from the elements, physical abuse,

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[10] Tolstoy, Nikolai. *The Secret Betrayal.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977, p. 34
[11] Elliot, Mark R. *Pawns of Yalta.* Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982, p. 8
[12] Ibid., p.8
[13] *The Secret Betrayal*, p. 38

epidemics or a combination of any or all of these. During the first winter of the war "almost all prisoner compounds suffered at least 30 percent fatalities, and in some the rate of attrition approached 95 percent.[14]

There were a number of German camp commanders who took a more utilitarian view of the situation. These men saw the Soviet POWs as a tremendous military resource that was being squandered. At no time did German troop strength equal that of the Soviets. It did not take long before German casualties began to take their toll on an Army which had been short of manpower from the outset. Consequently camp commanders began quietly diverting POWs into auxiliary forces. Early on in the war Soviet POWs were given the option to join the German ranks. There were those who joined the Wehrmacht with the idea that they would escape back to the nearest Red Army unit at the first opportunity. However, those who managed to do so were considered "contaminated" by contact with foreigners and either shot or sentenced to long terms in a Siberian labor camp.

The appalling conditions in the camps undoubtedly simplified the Wehrmacht recruiters' job. However, the single most important factor in persuading the Soviet soldiers to fight for the enemy was Stalin's abandonment of them. All Soviet soldiers were painfully aware that according to Soviet military philosophy any soldier taken alive was considered a traitor. Yet, having fought valiantly for their country, they could not accept nor believe that they would be so carelessly tossed aside. When it became evident that their government had deserted them, joining the enemy ranks became not only a

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[14] *Pawns of Yalta,* p. 9

matter of survival, but a protest against the man who had betrayed them. One Soviet soldier's justification for his decision to fight for Germany conveys the sense of rage and betrayal felt by thousands of his fellow countryman:

> You think, Captain, that we sold ourselves to the Germans for a piece of bread? Tell me, why did the Soviet Government forsake us? Why did it forsake millions of prisoners? We saw prisoners of all nationalities, and they were taken care of. Through the Red Cross they received parcels and letters from home; only the Russians received nothing. In Kassel I saw American Negro prisoners, and they shared their cakes and chocolates with us. Then why didn't the Soviet Government, which we considered our own, send us at least some plain hard tack? . . . Hadn't we fought? Hadn't we defended the Government? Hadn't we fought for our country? If Stalin refused to have anything to do with us, we didn't want to have anything to do with Stalin![15]

As the war progressed, the German policy of "voluntary" enlistment of Soviet POWs gave way to conscription. The captors handed out German uniforms, sometimes even weapons. Those who refused the offer to join the enemy ranks were shot on the spot. This usually served the purpose of convincing the remaining prisoners to don the Wehrmacht uniform. Throughout the repatriation operations, the Allied governments referred to Soviets captured in German uniform as traitors. Perhaps that label made the forced repatriation a bit more palatable, however it unfairly misrepresented the Soviet men who made the choice to fight for the enemy rather than die in a prison camp.

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[15] *The Secret Betrayal,* p. 41

3. Soviet Defectors

There were an estimated 800,000 to one million Soviets who defected to the German side. For many of them, the war presented a long-awaited opportunity to topple the hated Communist Government that had been forced upon them. The largest group was the Cossacks who, by June 1944, constituted six regiments numbering 20,000 men. Turks, Ukrainians, Finns, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Belorussians, Crimean and Volga Tartars, Kalmyks, North Caucasians, Georgians, Armenians and Azerbaidzhanis constituted the rest.

In addition to those who opposed Communism from the very beginning were those once-devoted Red Army soldiers who became disgusted and disillusioned with Stalin and the High Command. At the end of the first seven months of war, 309 million Red Army soldiers were in German hands. The high capture rate was a direct result the Soviet regime's unrealistic expectations of an army it had left totally unprepared to fight. Stalin's purge of the military's most talented senior officers just years earlier left the military playing catch-up the first year of the war.

Throughout the first year of the war, Soviet units were ordered to take on missions for which they did not have the necessary armament. Once engaged in a losing battle, units were denied permission to retreat. Millions died needlessly due to the incompetence of the government. Millions more were captured, including General Vlasov. In time the Germans were able to convince Vlasov to head a Russian Liberation Army (ROA) to fight alongside the Germans. He took on this role with the objective of leading his fellow countrymen in the fight to liberate Russia from Bolshevist terror and

tyranny. Vlasov's call to arms created new hope among thousands of Soviet soldiers and civilians who switched their allegiance to the ROA.

B. REPATRIATION PRE-YALTA

Long before the invasion of Normandy, Soviet prisoners had been falling into British hands. As the Allies fought in the North Africa campaign from 1942-1943 they seized thousands of Soviet citizens. Most were members of forced labor contingents. The Allies turned them over to Soviet hands through Egypt, Iran, and Iraq. Many confessed that they were terrified of going back to the USSR after having worked in support of Germany, even though they had not done so voluntarily. On the other hand, some reassured British officials that they would receive a hero's welcome. Perhaps they truly believed that or perhaps the NKVD commissars overseeing the operations " encouraged" them to present that view of the situation. As the transfers continued it turned out that those who were fearful of return had the clearer picture of what awaited them.

One British official who served with a Field Security Section in Persia at the time later reported an incident in which a Soviet liaison officer told a trainload of prisoners " We only intend to shoot one in ten of you".[16] Hearing this, many of the Soviets threw themselves under oncoming trains. Nevertheless, the repatriation of the Soviets continued. In fact the number of repatriates being shipped out to the transit camp in Egypt increased substantially with the invasion of Italy. While the Americans in the

[16] Ibid., p. 481

theater cooperated to some extent in these operations, they were content to let the British take the lead.

Four months after the invasion of France the Allies held approximately 28,000 Soviet nationals captured in German uniform and that number was quickly growing. Because the Soviets refused to acknowledge the existence of these men, Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF), headed by General Eisenhower, decided not to screen them out from among German POWs. When British facilities could no longer hold any more prisoners many were sent by boat to camps in the U.S. and Canada. Between 4,000 and 10,000 of the 400,000 POWs held within U.S. borders were Soviet citizens.[17] Once the Soviets learned the number of its citizens under Allied control, they quickly became interested in the problem that they had denied existed just a few months earlier and insisted that "Russian nationals" be segregated, given preferential treatment, and returned as soon as possible.

Complying with this request posed several problems. From a strictly logistical perspective, screening out Russian nationals from over half a million prisoners would prove a daunting task. It would be made all the more difficult by the fact that the Russians taken in German uniforms objected, almost to the man, to being returned to the Soviet Union. From a legal standpoint, the issue of how to classify Soviets captured in German uniform caused great concern and debate. The Soviet argument, quite naturally, was that their soldiers had been forced into service by the Germans and should not be "punished" any further by being treated as German prisoners of war. The Allies realized that for many

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[17] *Pawns of Yalta,* p. 31

of the Soviet POWs the "punishment" of being classified as a prisoner of war was the only thing that stood between them and an NKVD firing squad. Yet that was not a great concern for the Allied governments. What the Allies feared most was the danger of German reprisals against U.S. and British POWs who were not of American or British origin. Thus the debate on the legality of the issue of forced repatriation began.

C. LEGALITY OF FORCED REPATRIATION

In 1945 there were no laws or guidelines specifically dealing with the issue of forced repatriation. Neither the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 nor the Geneva Convention of 1929 addressed the issue directly. Chapter II, Article 4 of the Hague Convention states that prisoners "must be humanely treated." Title I. Article 2 of the Geneva Convention of 1929 states, "[Prisoners] must at all times be humanely treated and protected, particularly against acts of violence, insults and public curiosity. Measures of reprisal against them are prohibited." While neither of these articles specifically prohibit forced repatriation, they can in no way be interpreted to allow for the beating and gassing of prisoners with the aim of forcing them onto trains, trucks and ships to be handed over for torture, execution, or years of punishment in a Siberian labor camp. Yet when the antiseptic title of "forced repatriation" is stripped away that is what is left.

There could be no debate on this issue. Forcibly repatriating a person under these circumstances was a violation of the existing laws - perhaps not the letter of the law, but certainly the intent. Forcible repatriation also violated the precedent which had been set in International law. In his book The Secret Betrayal, Nikolai Tolstoy points out that,

"The European tradition of granting political asylum was so strong that no nation before 1939 appears even to have contemplated compelling the return home of citizens whose lives or liberty might be thereby endangered."

In fact thousands of Soviets risked their lives to make their way to U.S. and British controlled territory, so sure were they that they would be offered asylum. The precedent against forcible repatriation was not limited to Western European nations. In his book Operation Keelhaul, Julius Epstein reports that "From 1918 to 1921, the Soviets signed twenty-seven international treaties and agreements concerning the repatriation of prisoners of war and civilians. All were based upon the principle of voluntary repatriation only and contained almost identical clauses explicitly precluding any forced repatriation."[18] With that point silently conceded by the Allies, the debate turned to the question of whether or not the Soviet prisoners captured in German uniform should be regarded as German soldiers. If so, could they claim the protection of the Geneva Convention to which their country did not belong; and if so, would that preclude their being handed back to the Soviet Government against their will?

D. BRITISH DECISION TO USE FORCE

From the outset the Foreign Office was guided by what the Foreign Office legal expert John Galsworthy referred to as an interpretation based on "expediency." Prior to

[18] Epstein, Julius. *Operation Keelhaul: The Story of Forced Repatriation from 1944 to the Present.* Old Greenwich: Devin-Adair Company, 197 , p. 14

the Normandy invasion the repatriation of Soviet citizens had been completed quickly and quietly with seemingly no objections from the military personnel who had to carry it out.

Most of the prisoners captured during the North African campaign were civilians. However, after the invasion of Normandy, the majority of Soviets who fell into Allied hands were captured in German uniform and consequently awarded status as prisoners of war. Three days after the D-day landings Colonel Phillimore of the War Office wrote: "these men will at present, despite their Russian nationality, be treated as German prisoners of war. Foreign Office agree to this . .. ."[19]

As more and more Soviet troops fell into Allied hands, the British Foreign Office began to consider the risk of repatriating Soviets who were captured in German Uniform. Foreign Officer legal advisors were of the opinion that it was the uniform that determined a soldier's allegiance and no government had the right to "look behind the uniform" of any POW. They feared that if Germany discovered that Britain and America were handing members of her army over to almost certain execution, Germany would complain to her protecting power (Geneva). Even more unsettling was the notion that Germany might decide to take reprisals against British and American prisoners of war if they found out that the Allies had been returning their soldiers to the Soviet Union. Once the Foreign Office became aware of this risk it instructed field commanders not to repatriate anyone who was likely to receive serious punishment from the Soviets. (Just how the field commanders were supposed to make that determination was not clear.)

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[19] *The Secret Betrayal,* p. 419

The British hoped that this measure would appease both the Germans and the Soviets. While the Foreign Office feared German reprisals, it also feared the Soviets. The Allies had a fairly accurate idea of where the Allied POW camps were in eastern Germany, Poland and the Balkans. By the middle of 1944 the Red Army began to arrive within striking distance of many of these camps.[20] Neither Britain nor the U.S. wanted to do anything which might provoke Stalin to delay the return of U.S. and British POWs captured by the Red Army. The Foreign Office decided the only solution was to make it clear to the Soviet Union that although it could not hand over Soviets captured in German uniform until the risk of German reprisals was over, it had no intention of protecting them. Patrick Dean, a legal advisor to the Foreign Office set out the Foreign Office view of the matter as follows:

> This is purely a question for the Soviet authorities and does not concern His Majesty's Government. In due course all those with whom the Soviet authorities desire to deal must be handed over to them, and we are not concerned with the fact that they may be shot or otherwise more harshly dealt with than they might be under English law.[21]

On July 17, the War Cabinet met to consider the problem. As a result of its meeting it announced to the Foreign Office: "The War Office is only prepared to agree to hand over to the Soviet Authorities those Russians who are willing to go and we do not agree that any pledge should be given in a contrary sense to the Soviet Government."[22]

Just days later the Minister for Economic Warfare, Lord Selbourne sent letters of protest to Prime Minister Winston Churchill and British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden.

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[20] Deane, John R., *The Strange Alliance.* New York: Viking Press, 1946, p. 183
[21] *The Last Secret,* p. 7
[22] *The Secret Betrayal,* p. 52

In addition to his job as Minister for Economic Warfare, Lord Selbourne was responsible for the sabotage and espionage units operating in occupied Europe under Special Operations Executive. He was horrified at the Foreign Office's plan for the Soviet prisoners. His letter to the Prime Minister began:

> I greatly regret the Cabinet's decision to send these people back to Russia. It will mean certain death for them. . . . My officers have interviewed 45 of these prisoners and in every case their story is substantially the same. After weeks of appalling maltreatment and such starvation that cannibalism was not uncommon in their camps, their morale was pretty well broken. They were paraded and addressed by a German officer, who asked them to join a German labour unit. They were then asked individually whether they accepted the invitation. The first man replied no and was immediately shot. The others consequently said yes in order to save their lives. As soon as they were in the German labour unit they were given weapons and told that they were now in the German Army. None of them have any doubt that if they are sent back to Russia they will be shot and their families disgraced and maltreated.[23]

Lord Selbourne's protest caused the Prime Minister to order Eden to put the matter before the Cabinet a second time for reconsideration. Eden countered, "In spite of the report to which the Minister of Economic Warfare refers there are other reports and evidence which show that a large proportion of the prisoners, whatever their reasons, are willing and even anxious to return to Russia."[24] He then reminded the Prime Minister that these men had been "captured while serving in German military or para-military formations the behaviour of which in France has been revolting."[25]

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[23] *The Last Secret,* p.8
[24] *The Secret Betrayal,* p.56
[25] *The Last Secret,* p. 9

In light of the devastation in England, Eden could not see wasting the money and manpower it would require to care for men whom he considered as traitors. As he bluntly put it, "We surely do not wish to be permanently saddled with a number of these men." [26] Eden's most compelling argument, however, was that the Soviets might not be so willing to return British POWs if Churchill refused to return Soviets POWs. He warned Churchill:

> It is most important that they [British POWs] should be well cared for and returned as soon as possible. For this we must rely to a great extent upon Soviet goodwill and if we make difficulty over returning to them their own nationals I am sure it will reflect adversely upon their willingness to help in restoring to us our own prisoners.[27]

Despite these arguments Churchill insisted the matter be put before the Cabinet yet a third time. Eden now received a letter from Secretary of State for War P.J. Grigg. In his letter Grigg mentioned all of the points Eden brought out in his response to Churchill. However, Grigg held a more realistic view of the Soviets. He wrote,

> . . . if the choice is between hardship to our men and death to Russians our choice is plain. But I confess that I am not at all convinced that, whatever we do, the Russians will go out of their way to send our prisoners westwards at once or to deal with them in any special manner."[28]

Griggs, too called for a Cabinet ruling on the decision:

> In any case, the dilemma is so difficult that for my part I should like a Cabinet ruling as to its solution. If we hand the Russian prisoners back to their death it will be the military authorities who will do so on my instructions, and I am entitled to have behind me in this very unpleasant business the considered view of the Government.[29]

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[26] Ibid., p.9
[27] Ibid., p. 9
[28] Ibid., p. 10
[29] Ibid., p. 10

On Churchill's direction, Eden prepared a Cabinet Paper outlining the problem. In this paper he reiterated the same arguments he had made to the Prime Minister. However, he went one step further. He warned of another danger in not meeting the Soviets' demands: the possibility that Britain's refusal to repatriate Soviet citizens might strain the "Grand Alliance." Eden warned that the lives of the Soviet prisoners were not worth running the risk of causing the Soviets to order a halt to its advances along the eastern front. He ended his argument by saying that he would obtain assurance from the Soviet Government that the USSR would not bring any of the repatriates to trial or impose punishment on them during the continuation of hostilities with Germany.

For Eden, the decision to repatriate the Soviets was not a matter of justice, it was a matter of practical politics and military necessity. He was able to successfully convince the Cabinet that those were the two overriding concerns. Both Lord Selbourne and the Secretary of State for War, Mr. Griggs were more or less won over by Eden's arguments. September 4, 1944, the day after the Foreign Minister presented his paper, the War Cabinet approved the policy of forcible repatriation of Soviet citizens.

E. U.S. DECISION TO USE FORCE

The U.S. debate on the issue of forced repatriation did not begin until just shortly before the Yalta Conference. Before then the State Department and the military worked closely and quietly together to establish U.S. policy on the issue. The Soviets did their best to manipulate the U.S. into making a decision on forced repatriation before a treaty was negotiated. Having obtained Britain's assurance that it would return all Soviet

citizens "regardless of the individuals' wishes," the Soviet Ambassador, Andrei Gromyko, began to work to get the same agreement from the Americans.

In the fall of 1944 he fired off complaints about poor U.S. treatment of Soviet nationals captured in German ranks. He demanded that they be separated from the German enemy and given "full freedom." However, as soon as he realized that full freedom resulted in large numbers of disappearing Soviets, his concern for the treatment of his beloved countrymen turned into angry demands for the forced repatriation of traitors to the motherland.[30]

From the outset the U.S. policy in dealing with Soviets captured in German uniform had been not to "look behind the uniform" but instead to treat Soviets captured in German uniform as German POWs. Like the British, the Americans were concerned about German reprisals against Allied POWs. The possibility of mistreatment of Americans of German, Italian, Japanese, or Czech origin caused the U.S. particular concern. Therefore, Washington informed the Soviet Ambassador that Russians captured in German uniform would be have to be held as German POWs until the end of the war.

However, in an effort to appease the Soviets somewhat, the U.S. made one exception to this policy. Any prisoners who claimed Soviet citizenship were not protected by the Geneva Convention and were to be forcibly repatriated. The most sinister aspect about this policy was that the Americans would not inform the Soviet prisoners of the consequences of making such a claim. In a phone conversation between General B.M.

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[30] *Pawns of Yalta,* p.32

Bryan of the Provost Marshal General's Office in Washington and a Camp Rupert authority, General Bryan explained the policy as follows:

> Camp Rupert: If they do not claim Russian citizenship, they do not go back?
> General Bryan: They do not have to at this moment . . . . In other words if a fellow is smart, he will say, "no, I'm a German." He is a German then.[31]

The news of Britain's decision to use force to repatriate the Soviets came to Washington via the U.S Political Adviser in Italy, Alexander C. Kirk. In the most diplomatic of terms, Kirk alluded to the ramifications this policy had on the U.S.:

> I assume Department is considering advisability of assuring itself of the nature of methods which may be applied in compelling those Russian prisoners of war, who under previous arrangements were given option of retaining prisoner-of-war status, to return to Russia, especially in view of fact that I understand some were taken by our forces and delivered to British under arrangement whereunder that option prevailed.[32]

The Americans had handed over more than four thousand Soviets to British control. As a result of the new policy, the Americans were implicated in a breach of the Geneva convention and in danger of German retaliation. Upon hearing of the British decision, the U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union, W. Averell Harriman, cabled Secretary of State Cordell Hull to request clarification of the U.S. policy:

> . . . I would appreciate further enlightenment as to the exact nature of the policies established by the Combined Chiefs of Staff which is not clear to me from the Department's telegram. Does this mean that the Combined Staff propose to have Russians taken as German prisoners, delivered to the Soviet authorities against their will? If so what is the meaning of their statement that the purpose of their policy is to avoid risk of reprisals? If not how does the British

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[31] Ibid., p. 32
[32] *The Secret Betrayal,* p. 83

> Government come to instruct its Middle East command to deliver prisoners of war to the Soviet authorities whether they desire to be repatriated or not? [33]

When Washington approached the Foreign Office about the matter, they reported that there had been no final decision made on the use of force. Growing impatient for a U.S. decision, in October General Eisenhower wrote to the Combined Chiefs of Staff from SHAEF Headquarters. He pointed out that the only group of Soviets prisoners left in U.S. custody were those who had been taken by Bradley's 12th Army Group. Eisenhower found himself in the difficult position of having to explain to the Soviets why the prisoners under British control were handed over without question, while the Americans refused to repatriate the Soviet prisoners under their control. He urged the Combined Chiefs of Staff to adopt the British policy.

Finally, on 2 November, Admiral Leahy (President Roosevelt's Chief of Staff) forwarded a recommendation to the State Department that Soviet "claimants" should be returned regardless of their wishes. He explained that in light of the British policy and "from the military point of view . . . it is not advisable for the United States Government to proceed otherwise vis-à-vis the Soviet Government with respect to persons in this category."[34] Washington relented and on 8 November 1944 forwarded a letter to Soviet Ambassador Gromyko declaring that the U.S. would segregate "claimants to Soviet citizenship" and allow representatives of the Soviet embassy to have access to these individuals for the purpose of interviewing them. Without realizing it, the U.S. was about to enact one of the most controversial policies in its history.

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[33] *Operation Keelhaul,* p.30
[34] *The Secret Betrayal,* p.86

III. NEGOTIATING THE AGREEMENT

First thing you know we will be responsible for a big killing by the Russians . . . . Let the Russians catch their own Russians.

Henry L. Stimson
U.S. Secretary of War

A. OMEN OF THINGS TO COME

The first repatriation operations were carried out by British forces. On October 31, 1944, 10,139 male prisoners, thirty women, and forty-four boys were sent by ship from Liverpool to Murmansk. A report on the operation noted that only 12 personnel resisted; these men were put on board the ships "by force." It was later reported that upon arrival in Murmansk the prisoners were marched off under heavy guard.

The first repatriation operations for the Americans did not go quite as smoothly. On 28 and 29 December 1944, 1,100 Soviet claimants were transported from Camp Rupert for a west coast port. Seventy men resisted being sent back. "Three of them attempted suicide, one by hanging, one by stabbing himself, and one by hitting his head against a beam in one of the barracks."[35] All resistors were forced to board the ships. By 1 February 2,600 Soviet "claimants" had departed on Soviet ships bound for Siberian ports.

[35] Ibid., p. 88

B. NEGOTIATIONS

Both Britain and the U.S. had been attempting to reach a repatriation agreement with the Soviets for the better part of 1944, however up until January 1945 the Soviets had been extremely uncooperative. Nevertheless, during this time the Allies conceded to many Soviet demands in an effort to entice the Kremlin to negotiate. Frustrated by the Soviets' obstinacy, General Eisenhower had at one point suggested to General Deane that he curtail U.S. cooperation with Soviet authorities (i.e. allowing Soviet representatives full access to all Soviet prisoners and providing them every facility for their work) until they began negotiations. Deane counseled against this arguing that there was no chance of the U.S. "winning a battle of discourtesy with Soviet officials."[36]

The British and American approaches to the issue of reaching an agreement with the Soviets was markedly different. The Foreign Office's approach had been informal at best. By the time the Soviets announced that they were ready to negotiate an agreement in late December, both Churchill and Eden already considered the matter settled. On 11 October 1944 while at a dinner party at the British Embassy, Eden approached Stalin on the subject of Soviets under British control. Eden considered the subsequent conversation a binding verbal agreement between the two governments. He detailed that conversation in a telegram to London the following day:

> At dinner last night my conversation with Marshal Stalin turned for a moment on the Russian troops whom we had in England. The Marshal said he would be extremely grateful if any arrangements could be made to get them back here. I said we should be glad to do anything we could to help ... The Marshal repeated that he would be deeply in our debt if we could arrange the matter for him about

[36] *The Strange Alliance*, p. 186

> this. I replied that he could be sure that we would do all we could to help, and I felt sure that in return his Government would give all the help in their power in respect of British prisoners in Germany as and when the Red Army reached the German prison camps in which they were located. The Marshal said at once that certainly this would be done. He would make this his personal charge and he gave me his personal word that every care and attention would be given to our men.[37]

Eden's tone implies that with this conversation the matter was settled. A review of his memo shows that Stalin made no agreement to repatriate British soldiers quickly - or at all. Eden had merely gotten Stalin's "personal word that every care and attention" would be given to British POWs. Six days later Eden followed up this conversation with Foreign Minister Viacheslav Molotov, who stated that the Soviet Government needed to know whether the British Government consented to the "repatriation to the USSR of *all* Soviet citizens, without reference to the wishes of the individuals concerned, who in some cases might not wish to return because they had collaborated with the Germans."[38] Eden gave such consent on behalf of the British Government and two weeks later, Britain shipped 10,000 Soviets to Murmansk.

When the Soviets finally did offer a draft agreement in December, Eden urged the War Cabinet to accept the Soviet terms and ensure swift agreement at the upcoming Conference at Yalta. The War Cabinet complied with Eden's request and approved the Soviet terms with a few minor changes. Neither Churchill nor Eden bothered to attend this session, so secure were they that the War Cabinet would comply with their wishes. And so the fate of the Soviet citizens under British control was summarily decided.

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[37] *The Last Secret*, p. 21
[38] Ibid., p. 22

The U.S. took a somewhat more formal approach in dealing with the Soviets. General John Deane of the U.S. Military Mission in Moscow had been pressing for the Soviet Union to draw up arrangements for the care and speedy repatriation of liberated American prisoners since June 1944. Anxious to ensure a plan was in place as soon as possible, both he and Averell Harriman sent a letter to the Red Army Deputy Chief of Staff and the Vice Premier, proposing the following:

1. That plans be worked out as far in advance as possible for the return of prisoners-of-war to their respective countries as soon as either side foresaw their imminent recapture of prisoner-of-war camps.

2. That both the U.S. and the USSR follow a practice of "prompt and continued" exchange of information regarding the locations of prisoner-of-war camps in hostile territory.

3. That Soviet and American officers should always be available to go to those camps that came under each other's armies "for the purpose of establishing the nationality of the prisoners who were liberated and assuming control of them until they were repatriated."

4. That individuals or small groups claiming Soviet or American nationality be promptly reported by name to the authorities of the nation in which they claimed citizenship so that their claims could be substantiated and they could be repatriated as soon as possible.[39]

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[39] *The Strange Alliance*, p. 185

It was not until after the U.S. had already abided by all points of this proposal that Moscow was willing to negotiate an agreement. By 28 December 1944, when the Soviets finally announced that two generals had been appointed to negotiate with Deane, the U.S. had already agreed to forced repatriation of Soviet claimants, accommodated Soviet requests for the admission of Soviet contact teams into the Western theater of operations, drastically relaxed restrictions on Soviet nationals captured in German ranks, and allowed Moscow representatives free access to these prisoners. The Soviets, on the other hand, had conceded nothing.

The first meeting between the General Deane and the Soviet Generals took place on 19 January 1945. The Soviets presented General Deane with a complete Soviet draft agreement. (The following day they presented a similar one to the British Embassy.) General Deane's assessment of the draft was that it was "a reasonable plan and with a few minor amendments was exactly what we wanted."[40] Not all agreed with General Deane's appraisal.

Even before the Soviet presented their draft of the agreement, a heated debate was underway within the federal bureaucracy over the stance the U.S. had taken on the issue. Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson adamantly objected to "turning over German prisoners of Russian origin to the Russians." He warned, "First thing you know we will be responsible for a big killing by the Russians. . . . Let the Russians catch their own Russians."[41] Attorney General Francis Biddle also objected to the policy. He questioned

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[40] Ibid., p. 189
[41] T*he Pawns of Yalta,* pp. 36-37

the lawful right to remove Soviet citizens from U.S. territory by force. On 5 January 1945 he informed Stimson that U.S. authorities were repatriating Soviets

> . . . without fulfilling the requirement of either the deportation provisions of the immigration laws or the provisions of any extradition treaties . . . I gravely question the legal basis or authority for surrendering the objecting individuals to representatives of the Soviet Government . . . . Even if these men should be technically traitors to their own government, I think the time-honored rule of asylum should be applied . . . . It has been so applied in many cases of men who were firmly regarded as traitors or otherwise political criminals in their own country.[42]

Stimson agreed with Biddle, at least regarding those who objected to being returned. He cautioned Washington that before the U.S. repatriated any Soviets it should ensure that they were not being delivered to execution or punishment. On 16 January at a meeting with Navy Secretary James Forrestal, Undersecretary of State Joseph Grew, Undersecretary of War Robert Patterson, and Assistant Secretary of War John McCloy, Stimson reiterated his objections to the indiscriminate use of coercion in returning Russian citizens to the Soviets. The following passage from his diary describes what transpired at that meeting:

> The Russians are making some awkward demands on us. They wish to have turned over to them German prisoners that we have taken who are of Russian citizenship, and the State Department has consented to this in spite of the fact that it seems very likely that the Russians will execute them when they get them. I pointed out that was contrary to the traditions of sanctuary ... and besides it violated the rules of the Geneva protocol toward prisoners of war ... I refused to sign the letter which they had drawn [up] for me consenting to [forced repatriation for all Soviet POWs]. [43]

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[42] Ibid., p. 37
[43] Ibid., p. 37

The conference at Yalta was scheduled to begin 4 February. The United States was determined to walk away from the conference with a signed repatriation agreement. In light of the obvious dissension over the issue of repatriation, Washington charged the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC) with formulating the definitive American repatriation policy. The counterproposal offered by the SWNCC differed sharply in some areas from the Soviet and British versions.[44] The recommendations of the SWNCC mattered little, however, for they were ignored by the American delegation sent to handle the repatriation issue.

Ambassador Harriman, Secretary of State Stettinius, and General Deane were dispatched to Yalta to negotiate the agreement. The British and American delegations held preliminary meetings in order to arrive at a consensus on the terms of the agreement before discussing the matter with the Soviets. The Americans were quickly won over to Foreign Minister Eden's viewpoint. Messages received from General Eisenhower strengthened Eden's argument that the sooner an agreement was reached, the better it would be for British and American POWs. Eisenhower stressed the urgency of coming to a decision over the 21,000 Russians in US custody. He wrote:

> Our experience shows that about five per cent of prisoners captured from the Germans are Russian citizens. Also, approximately four per cent of these Russians require hospital treatment. We shall, therefore, have a continuing accession of Russians as operations proceed. The only complete solution to this problem from all points of view is the early repatriation of these Russians.[45]

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[44] The SWNCC proposal specified that repatriation would be mandatory only for civilian "claimants" and captured Red Army soldiers who did not fight for the Germans. Civilians not admitting Soviet citizenship and "collaborating soldiers" would be exempt. The original draft specified "Soviet Citizens" for repatriation.

[45] *The Secret Betrayal,* p. 94

When Acting Secretary of State Joseph Grew got word that the U.S. was on the verge of accepting the British draft agreement he sent a telegram to Stettinius pointing out that the British draft of the agreement failed to deal with certain key issues.

> . . . the agreement would not appear to cover the following specific points which were incorporated in the United States counter-proposals forwarded to JCS (Joint Chiefs of Staff) with you:
>
> 1. Protection of Geneva Convention which we have informed Soviet Government we will accord to Soviet citizens captured in German uniform who demanded such protection.
>
> 2. Soviet citizens in the United States not prisoners of war whose cases the Attorney General feels should be dealt with on basis of traditional American policy of asylum. . . .
>
> 5. Persons claimed as citizens by the Soviet authorities who were not Soviet citizens prior to outbreak of war and do not now claim Soviet citizenship.
>
> It is felt that these questions and others referred to in JCS 1266 and 1266/1 should be brought to your attention in order that consideration may be given to them before final agreement is reached.[46]

Stettinius dismissed the need to incorporate these points into the final agreement. He responded to Grew on 9 February:

> The consensus here is that it would be unwise to include questions relative to the protection of the Geneva convention and to Soviet citizens in the US in an agreement which deals primarily with the exchange of prisoners liberated by the Allied armies as they march into Germany. With respect to "claimants", notwithstanding the danger of German retaliation, we believe there will be serious delays in the release of our prisoners of war unless we reach prompt agreement on this question.[47]

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[46] *Operation Keelhaul*, pp. 43-44
[47] *The Secret Betrayal*, p. 94

Two days later the Soviet-American and Soviet-British Agreements were signed. Neither of the agreements contained any provisions regarding the return of the unwilling citizens to the USSR. Although, undeniably, both the British and U.S. governments were well aware that this would soon become the most troublesome aspect of the repatriation operations, they chose to ignore the issue in the interest of facilitating the agreement.

C. THE REPATRIATION AGREEMENT

The signatories of both the British and American Repatriation Agreements left the Yalta Conference pleased that the issue of Repatriation had been settled. According to General Deane the U.S.-Soviet Agreement was "a good one," the only problem was that the Soviets did not abide by it.

One of the biggest critics of the Soviet-American Repatriation Agreement, Julius Epstein, criticizes those involved in drafting the treaty for their failure to include a provision against forced repatriation. He contends that it was the Western Allies' responsibility to raise the issue and they failed to meet that responsibility. Epstein points out that various provisions of the agreement were worded "so as to make it appear that repatriation itself was the only problem to be solved - regardless of how, voluntarily or forcibly!"[48] He specifically refers to Articles 1, 2, and 7 of the treaty which read as follows:

> Article 1: **All Soviet citizens liberated by the forces operating under United States command** and all United States citizens liberated by the forces operating under Soviet command will, without delay after their liberation, be separated from enemy

[48] *Operation Keelhaul,* p.25

> prisoners of war and will be maintained separately from them in camps or points of concentration **until they have been handed over to the Soviet or United States authorities**, as the case may be, at places agreed upon between those authorities. ...
>
> Article 2: The contracting parties shall ensure that their military authorities shall without delay inform the competent authorities of the other party **regarding citizens of the other contracting party found by them, and will at the same time take the necessary steps to implement the provisions of this agreement.** Soviet and United States repatriation representatives will have the right of immediate access into the camps and points of concentration where their citizens are located and they will have the right to appoint the internal administration and set up the internal discipline and management in accordance with the military procedure and laws of their country. . . . Hostile propaganda directed against the contracting parties or against any of the United Nations will not be permitted.
>
> Article 7: The contracting parties shall, wherever necessary, use all practicable means to ensure the evacuation to the rear of these **liberated citizens**. They also undertake to use all practicable means to transport liberated citizens to places to be agreed upon **where they can be handed over to the Soviet or United States authorities** respectively. **The handing over of these liberated citizens** shall in no way be delayed or impeded by the requirements of their temporary employment.[49] (bold print added)

The phrasing used in the above articles certainly implies that repatriation was not considered to be voluntary. The term "liberated citizens" stripped away the protection the U.S. had previously offered to Soviet prisoners by stipulating that only "Soviet claimants" were subject to repatriation. Why did the U.S. and Britain so readily agree to the Soviet wording of the Agreement?

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[49] Ibid., pp. 23-25

As stated earlier, Britain had considered the matter resolved in October based on the cocktail conversation between Stalin and Eden. Eden's view on forced repatriation is summed up by the comment he scribbled across Lord Selbourne's letter of protest: "It does not deal with the point, if these men do not go back to Russia, where can they go? We don't want them here."[50] From the beginning, Eden considered it more practical from both an economical and logistical standpoint, as well as more politically expedient, to enact the policy of forced repatriation. In his words, Britain "could not afford to be sentimental about this".[51]

The overriding concern for the U.S. in the matter of repatriation was ensuring that U.S. POWs came home quickly and safely. This was no secret to the Soviets. Stalin knew he would have to apply pressure to the U.S. to get them to agree to his terms. than he had needed more incentive than the British to come around to his point of view. Indications are that this pressure came in the form of veiled threats concerning the non-return of U.S. prisoners.

On 5 January Attorney General Biddle admitted to Secretary of War Stimson that "the Russians have already threatened to refuse to turn over to us American prisoners of war whom they may get possession of in German internment camps."[52] Former State Department official Elbridge Durbrow stated that the United States had no choice in the matter of forced repatriation. Durbrow had been stationed in Moscow during the purge trials of the 1930's and knew all too well the brutality of the Soviet government. He was

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[50] *The Last Secret,* p. 8
[51] Ibid., p. 9
[52] *Pawns of Yalta,* p. 41

aware of the retribution awaiting the returning "Vlasovites," however he explained that his primary concern was Soviet retaliation against Americans should Washington not sign an exchange agreement to the Soviet's liking. Durbrow states that the U.S. was "blackmailed" into the repatriation agreement. The fear of American soldiers being at the mercy of the Red Army was also a huge concern of military leaders. An aide to Eisenhower explained:

> The point of concern about U.S. prisoners in Soviet hands was real and well based . . . . Nothing in Solzhenitsyn's *Archipelag Gulag* was unknown to us by 1944 - and it horrified our command, much as the facts of German slave labor and the gas chambers did. [53]

However, in light of more recent information, it seems that the purge trials and Solzhenitsyn's novel were not necessarily the only reasons behind U.S. concerns. A 1994 National Defense Research Institute report on POW/MIA Issues for World War II and the Early Cold War indicates that the files held by the Office of the Military Attaché at the American Embassy Moscow make it clear that the U.S. had much more concrete information about U.S. POWs in Soviet territory. According to the report, this file contains "copies of perhaps one hundred letters to and from U.S. and Russian authorities concerning individual American servicemen and entire crews of U.S. aircraft presumably lost over Soviet territory.[54] Knowledge of these missing Americans undoubtedly played a major role in Washington's decision to go along with forced repatriation. The report states:

> Russian President Boris Yeltsin, in a June 1992 letter to the Senate Select Committee on POW/MIAs, noted that '23,000 . . .

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[53] Ibid., p.42

[54] Cole, Paul. *POW/MIA Issues: Volume 2, World War II and the Early Cold War,* National Defense Research Institute, RAND, 1994, p. 10

> US citizens' were found in Soviet-occupied territory or otherwise in Soviet custody following World War II. . . . '114 US citizens, mostly of German nationality who had fought on the side of Germany and were taken prisoner with weapons, were court-martialed. President Yeltsin's letter is silent on the question of American POWs who were not repatriated after being liberated by Soviet forces from German POW camps.[55]

Later on the report states:

> In November 1992, President Yeltsin's emissary to the Senate Select Committee testified that by directive of Soviet dictator Josef Stalin, an undetermined number of American POWs liberated by Soviet forces were "summarily executed" while others were forced to renounce their citizenship.[56]

It is clear that Washington was aware that the Soviets were holding American citizens at the time of the Yalta Conference. The report states that "there is no question that many bomber crews survived after parachuting or crash landing in territory controlled by the Soviets forces." However, it adds that the Soviets refused to provide any information concerning many of the American POWs from these aircrews who they considered to be Soviet citizens because of their East European background (i.e., U.S. citizens of Rumanian, Hungarian or other East European descent).

According to the report, during the American air war against Japan, dozens of American aircraft made forced landings in Soviet territory after being damaged by Japanese air defenses. Many of the crews perished in the crash landings; however, others survived and were repatriated during the war "in an elaborate operation that involved the Soviet Foreign Ministry and cooperation with the NKVD." The most relevant aspect of this operation is the time frame. American aircrews began to accumulate in Soviet

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[55] Ibid., pp. 5-6
[56] Ibid., p 12

territory in the Far East in 1942. Sometime before December 1943 the Soviets agreed to "arrange an escape" for these prisoners. As explained in the report, "The operation was a closely held secret, in part because the Soviet Union, which was not a belligerent at the ime in the war against Japan, was obligated as a neutral to hold the American detainees."[57]

In December 1943 and January 1944 U.S. Ambassador Harriman began to press the Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov to expedite the escape arrangements. By December 1944 there were 130 American internees at Tashkent and more coming from the Far East." The escape plan was set in motion on 2 February 1945 when LT Colonel McCabe received orders from *General Deane* to arrange the escape in conjunction with designated NKVD officers. It was not until 14 February, three days after General Deane signed the Repatriation Agreement, that the entire group of internees left the USSR for Teheran.

It seems no coincidence that the Soviet's promise to "arrange an escape" of the American prisoners came shortly before the USSR consented to negotiate a repatriation agreement with the U.S. Nor does it seem coincidental that the Soviets quickly followed up this promise with the presentation of their draft of the repatriation agreement. It could be argued that, effectively, the American aircrews were Soviet hostages. The Soviets made it quite clear to the U.S. the price of their release: U.S. acceptance of forced repatriation. It is ironic that the National Defense Research Institute report commends the Soviet return of the American bomber crews with the following statement: "Unlike the Swedish government, which traded interned Allied airmen to the British government for

[57] Ibid., p. 12

shipments of equipment and fuel, there is no evidence in the record that the Soviet government engaged in human barter."[58]

The documentation clearly shows that those involved in negotiating the Repatriation Agreements were well aware of the fate awaiting the Soviets who were being forced home against their will. However, for the troops carrying out the operations, the brutal reception awaiting the Soviets came as a shock, as did the Soviets' fierce resistance to returning home.

And so a policy had been negotiated at the top levels of the Soviet, British and U.S. governments. Now it is time to turn to the implementation of this policy.

D. THE MILITARY ROLE IN DECIDING ON FORCE

Before the Allies broke into western Germany, efforts to care for displaced persons (DPs) proceeded smoothly. The projected estimates for the numbers of refugees were, up to that point, fairly accurate. The military was able to care for, register, and transport these personnel to France, Belgium, and Italy without too much disruption to the primary mission of fighting the war.

Once the Allies broke into western Germany the situation quickly changed. In a matter of weeks, the British and American units were swamped with nearly seven million displaced persons - not to mention millions of uprooted Germans - who were wandering around Europe either trying to get home or with no place to go.[59] Soviet and Central

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[58] Ibid., p. 12

[59] Marrus, Michael R. *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 310

European POWs and DPs formed the great majority of those liberated by the Allies. Approximately 5.5 million Soviet citizens were released from captivity in the former Reich. These included over a million prisoners of war, approximately two million forced laborers, as well as millions who headed west to escape the Red Army and the reimposition of Soviet control. Over two million of these found themselves under British and American control.[60]

Such a large number of people were a considerable burden on Allied forces. In the beginning, Soviet DPs required more attention than any other prisoners. Having suffered more than most prisoners of the Nazis, the Soviets were half-starved and in desperate need of medical attention. Not surprisingly, food, medical supplies, and personnel to care for the sick were scarce. In addition, they were fast becoming a discipline problem. Throughout the war, the German's maltreatment of the Soviets was second only to their maltreatment of the Jews. Once freed from the German POW camps or forced labor camps, large numbers of Soviets sought their revenge on the German population. The Soviets quickly earned a reputation for destructive behavior and were a continual threat to public order.[61]

To make matters worse, members of the Soviet repatriation committees assigned to the camps kept up a constant harangue about the poor conditions for the prisoners and the need to repatriate them immediately. Faced with an unmanageable situation, General Eisenhower again began to push for repatriation. His frustration with the situation was obvious in the following correspondence to Washington:

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[60] Ibid., pp. 308-313
[61] Ibid., p. 309

> These displaced persons are a constant source of misunderstanding and controversial discussion with representatives of the Soviet Military Mission who make very exacting demands as to the care, administration, and conditions of their nationals. ... The only complete solution to this problem from all points of view is the early repatriation of these Russians.[62]

The care and management of the DPS was taking valuable time and attention away from the more pressing concern for the American commanders in Europe at this time: namely, the transfer of three million men, together with their equipment, to the Pacific theater and the war with Japan. The prospect of speedy repatriation of as many DPs as possible undoubtedly was viewed as a matter of military necessity. The fewer DPs to take care of, the more resources that could be devoted to more important issues.

As already discussed, documentation shows that the Foreign policy makers in Washington and the Foreign Office held few illusions about the reception Soviets repatriates would receive upon return to the USSR. However, it is not as clear whether the military leaders expected the worst. For the most part the biographies of military leaders involved in the repatriation operations (i.e., General Eisenhower, General Deane, General Patton, General Clay, to name a few) are silent on the issue of their expectations concerning the Soviet government's treatment of its returnees. The fact that they fail to discuss the matter could be taken to mean that they all too clearly understood the repercussions of forced repatriation and were, therefore, unwilling to discuss their decisions to use force in their biographies. That is the conclusion Mark Elliott draws in his book Pawns of Yalta: "Indeed, Deane, Eisenhower, and Marshall agreed to Moscow's insistence upon forced repatriation *because* they had no illusions about Russian

[62] Ibid., p. 314

ruthlessness and *because* they feared for the safe return of GIs stranded in Eastern Europe."[63] Whatever their expectations about Soviet treatment of its returnees, it is clear that military leaders did not expect such fierce resistance from the Soviet repatriates nor did they expect the toll such resistance would take on Allied troops.

[63] *Pawns of Yalta,* p.46

IV. THE POLICY ENACTED

So you are sending us to our death after all.
I believed in you. Democracy has let us down.

Major Ivanov Pavel

A. FALSE IMPRESSIONS

If the military leaders were surprised by the fierce resistance of the Soviet repatriates, the troops were utterly shocked and confused. The news of Germany's surrender was received with relief and joy by Allied troops. Yet, for many of the Soviets, Germany's defeat meant victory for the hated Communist regime under which they had suffered and which they had hoped to escape.

The Americans and British public could not possibly begin to comprehend the Soviet reaction. After VE day, the call that came up from England and the U.S. was "Bring the Boys Home." There was nothing the Allied soldiers wanted more. It would never have occurred to them that anyone destined for home (with the exception of the Germans) did not feel the same way. Neither the soldiers nor the British and American public had any inkling of what Stalin had in store for his "boys."

The British and American failure to understand life in the USSR was not merely a matter of ignorance of the Soviet system. On both sides of the ocean a pro-Soviet propaganda campaign had been waged by the media for several years. This was especially true in the U.S. When America became allied with the USSR, the Soviets became the good guys. After all, America would never ally itself with a murderous, oppressive

government. In 1944 and 1945 the American press and film industry (no doubt encouraged by the government) began to tout the Soviet Union as our good neighbor. Pawns of Yalta author, Mark Elliott, describes how the Soviet Union was portrayed to the American public by the press: Soviet economic planning and forced industrialization were described as the Russian version of the New Deal. "Uncle Joe" was a bit eccentric but a nice guy nonetheless. Life magazine admired the Russians as "one hell of a people", said they "looked, dressed and thought like Americans", and gullibly compared the Soviet Secret Police to the Federal Bureau of Investigation.[64] The U.S. public wanted to believe this. It is no wonder, then, that they equated repatriation with the American idea of "bringing the boys home" and that Allied troops could not understand the Soviets' hesitation over returning to their Motherland.

The British public were victims of the same deception. Captain Denis Hill, a British Officer in Charge of one of the first British repatriation operations, was typically skeptical of the repatriates' motives the first time he encountered their objections to returning home. Approached by Soviet returnees who confronted him with their fears of returning to the USSR during one of the initial repatriation operations, he dismissed their fears with "incredulity" based on the fact that "everything he had read the past four years led him to picture Soviet Russia as governed by men devoted to overthrowing tyranny and establishing the Four Freedoms."[65] However, it would not take long before the troops came to understand the ugly truth about the USSR.

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[64] Ibid., p. 46
[65] *The Secret Betrayal,* p. 55

B. MASS REPATRIATION

By 28 February, just a little over two weeks after the Repatriation Agreement was signed at Yalta, the various headquarters under SHAEF had received, and passed on to subordinate commanders, the text of the Agreement along with instructions concerning its implementation. At the time the orders were received, the Western Allies had approximately 370,000 Soviet POWs in their custody, many of whom had been captured in German uniform. Honoring the spirit of the Geneva Convention, SHAEF ordered forced repatriation only for POWs and DPs who claimed Soviet citizenship. However SHAEF commanders soon received word from Washington that they were to turn all Soviet citizens over to the Red Army, "regardless of their individual wishes."[66]

On 23 May 1945, the Halle or Leipzig Agreement was signed between representatives of both the Soviet High Command and SHAEF. It specified: "All former prisoners of war and citizens of the USSR liberated by the Allied Forces and all former prisoners of war and citizens of Allied Nations liberated by the Red Army will be delivered through the Army lines to the corresponding Army Command of each side."[67] Informal exchanges of prisoners had already resulted in an estimated 20,000 Soviets being handed over to the Red Army.[68] Under the Halle Agreement citizens of the Big Three were given priority over all others.

By 28 May 1945, 662 American prisoners had been turned over to U.S. control. This was the most cooperation the U.S. had received from the Soviets to date. In return,

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[66] *Pawns of Yalta,* pp. 80-81
[67] *The Secret Betrayal,* p. 308
[68] Ibid., p. 308

the U.S. was shipping Russians over to the Soviets as fast as they could, on occasion exceeding the quotas stipulated in the Agreement. In two months SHAEF had delivered 1,393,902 Soviets to the Red Army. "The average daily total of Russian repatriates from all assembly points for the period 27 May - 5 June was 60,000 and for June 9-12, 101,650. . . ."[69] Mass repatriation operations lasted until September 1945. In these five months 2,034,000 Soviets citizens had been returned.[70]

As a result of the huge scale of the initial operations and the dispatch with which they were carried out, resistance was minimal. To use the words of an American soldier assisting in the operations: a "super-saturation of events" precluded soldiers and repatriates alike from fully understanding what was happening. In his book The Secret Betrayal, Nikolai Tolstoy explains the Soviets' compliance another way: "Like men coming out into glaring sunlight after confinement in a subterranean cave, the Russians were for the most part dazed and content to go wherever they were led. There was not time for reflection, nor yet for stories of the fate awaiting them to filter back." [71]

For the most part, eye-witnesses of the repatriation operations reported that the Soviets citizens appeared happy and willing to go. Tolstoy offers part of the explanation for the lack of resistance. Another part was provided by a Russian informant who reported that during the initial operations it was fairly easy to escape to the hills due to the "leniency" of the American soldiers.[72] Whether this leniency was merely a result of American soldiers being overwhelmed and overworked, or whether it was a matter of

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[69] *Pawns of Yalta,* p.81
[70] Ibid., p. 81
[71] *The Secret Betrayal,* p. 309
[72] Ibid., p. 482

soldiers seeing no sense in forcing someone back to their country is not clear. Whatever the reason for the "leniency" of the American troops during these initial operations, the absence of Soviet resistance contributed to the temporary illusion that, as described by a *London Times* reporter, "all had but one goal - to get home."[73]

C. VLASOV'S ARMY

When repatriation operations began British and American troops accepted their duties as just another mopping-up exercise. As the soldiers learned more and more from the Soviet prisoners about life under Stalin's regime and came to understand why the Soviets did not want to return, they began to find ways to help the Soviets escape. The first known example of a soldier acting out of conscience, rather than strictly obeying orders, occurred with the surrender of General Vlasov's Army. Although it was a small gesture, it was an omen of things to come.

As mentioned earlier, even before the Halle agreement had been signed, the U.S. handed over approximately 20,000 Soviet citizens. Included in that number were members of Vlasov's Army. Throughout April 1945 Vlasov's Army was slowly being squeezed between the Red Army and General Patton's 3rd Army. Capture was imminent. After a failed attempt at indirect negotiations with the Americans for surrender, Vlasov sent General Vasily Malyshkin to seek out the nearest American unit. Malyshkin encountered the US 7th Army, commanded by General Patch, near the Austrian border.

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[73] *The Last Secret,* p. 65

Malyshkin requested that the Americans accept the surrender of Vlasov's troops and treat them in accordance with the provisions of the Geneva Convention. The following day, after conferring with Eisenhower, Patch informed Malyshkin that he would accept the surrender, however, he could only promise that the troops would be treated in "strict accordance with the regulations in force regarding German prisoners of war."[74] Patch then held Malyshkin and his assistant in camp for several days. When the Germans surrendered on 8 May, Patch informed the Soviets that they were no longer emissaries but prisoners of war.[75]

Upon hearing of Germany's capitulation, Vlasov made up his mind to personally surrender to the Americans. As he and his party were making their way toward the nearest American outpost in Pilsen, all but one regiment of Vlasov's 2nd division, which had remained behind, was captured by the Red Army. Many of the officers were either shot or hanged on the spot.

Upon reaching Pilsen Vlasov was informed by a U.S. General[76] that if he surrendered unconditionally, the Americans would receive him and his men, but the General would offer no guarantee that the U.S. would not hand them all over to the Soviets. While Vlasov was agonizing over what to do he was informed by a U.S. officer that one of his divisions had recently arrived in the nearby town of Schlüesselburg. The officer suggested that Vlasov join them, inquiring whether General Vlasov had enough gas

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[74] *The Secret Betrayal,* p. 293

[75] In his book The Secret Betrayal, Nikolai Tolstoy states that over the winter of 1944-45, the USSR had been pressing for the return of specific members of Vlasov's Army. Considering the fact that they were detained, one must wonder if Malyshkin or his assistant were among those named by the USSR.? If so, on whose orders were they detained ? If not, for what purpose were they detained?

[76] None of the accounts of Vlasov's surrender identify the U.S. General by name

for his car - it was an obvious message that now was the time for escape. Vlasov passed up this opportunity, instead traveling under American escort to Schlüsselburg to meet his troops.

Throughout the war, Vlasov had been painted as the worst kind of traitor. In Allied eyes, he had not only turned against his country and joined forces with the despised Nazi regime, he had recruited thousands of Soviet citizens to join him. Few stopped to consider the reasons why Vlasov's cause attracted so many. It must have come as a complete surprise to the Americans to see that the man who had been portrayed by the Soviets as evil incarnate was, in fact, a courageous, professional soldier.

As the Americans at Pilsen learned of Vlasov's history and grew to understand of the purpose of his cause, many developed admiration and respect for this brave man who had gone against all odds to fight for freedom and justice for his people. This admiration was demonstrated by the protective attitude some of the soldiers adopted toward Vlasov.

On the day the Americans were due to evacuate Pilsen and fall back on a prearranged U.S.-Soviet demarcation line, Captain Donaghue, the town commander, explained to Vlasov that he had no instructions to take the surrendered Soviets. Donaghue suggested that the General make his way to British territory and attempt negotiations with them.[77] Later on that day Donaghue received a message from the Army staff wanting to know if Vlasov was in Schlüsselburg. Before answering it Donaghue informed Vlasov of the message and asked him, "Are you here?"[78] Once again, an

[77] Obviously Donaghue was unaware that the British would offer Vlasov no protection either.
[78] *The Secret Betrayal*, p. 298

American soldier was prepared to go against his superiors to do what he felt was morally right. Again, General Vlasov refused to abandon his troops. Vlasov answered, "Yes."

Vlasov made a final appeal to the Americans. He wrote a memorandum stating that "he and all the leaders of the Russian Opposition Army were ready to appear before an international court." He stressed the fact that it would be grave violation of international law if the Americans were to forcibly repatriate them to the Soviets, which would mean sure death. He explained that his division should not be considered as volunteers in German service but as a political organization, "a broad opposition movement," which should not be treated according to the law of war.[79] Captain Donaghue radioed this message to the American staff and received the reply that Vlasov's troops could pass into American-occupied territory.

Fearing that the Americans would betray them to the Soviets, a large number of Vlasov's soldiers decided to surrender to the Soviets with the hopes that they would be able to survive their sentences in the forced-labor camps. Some passed into the American zone, only to be repatriated later. Many took refuge in the surrounding woods but were easily hunted down by Red Army soldiers. An esitmated 10,000 were either captured or shot.

Only Vlasov and his party remained. The majority of those in the party left in a small convoy at approximately two o'clock on 12 May.[80] Approximately one mile outside of Schlüesselburg their convoy was halted by members of the Red Army. Red Army

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[79] *Operation Keelhaul*, p. 68
[80] *The Secret Betrayal*, p. 300

soldiers ordered Vlasov out of his car. Vlasov demanded the American escort to protest his abduction. The soldier said nothing.

When Donaghue learned of Vlasov's capture, he sent out search parties, to no avail. Again Donaghue acted out of a sense of moral obligation, ignoring American policy. According to Julius Epstein, Donaghue drove the remainder of Vlasov's party "sixty kilometers into the U.S. zone of occupation, gave them plenty of food, and dismissed them."[81]

When Vlasov disappeared, SHAEF authorities reported that they did not know his whereabouts. However, a year later, the U.S. Army announced publicly that Vlasov had "been turned over to the Russians by Czechoslovak authorities after he was taken prisoner at Prague on 5 May 1945."[82]

1. A Handful of Exceptions

Of the approximately one million men who believed in General Vlasov's cause and fought to bring down Stalin, almost all were forced back into the Soviet Union. However, one American officer, General Kennedy, succeeded in saving some. Estimates of the number saved vary from 800[83] to 8,000[84]. Whatever the actual number, the General's actions are the relevant point.

On 24 April 1945, Theodor Oberländer, Commandant in charge of training for Vlasov's troops, and crossed through the German-U.S. front lines to negotiate a surrender

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[81] *Operation Keelhaul*, p. 69
[82] *The Secret Betrayal*, p. 301
[83] *Operation Keelhaul*, p. 70
[84] *The Secret Betrayal*, p. 290-291

with the Americans. Upon being presented to General Kennedy of the U.S. Army, Oberländer stated that his only condition for the surrender of his units was that they not be handed over to the Soviets. As a result of long negotiations, General Kennedy gave his word that he would accept the surrender of the troops and would not hand the men over to the Soviets.

Here the accounts take different turns. According to Tolstoy, General Kennedy was able to keep his word and, under the powerful protection of General Patton, save 8,000 men. According to Epstein however, Kennedy was not allowed to honor his word and the majority of Vlasov's soldiers were repatriated. Epstein reports that when General Kennedy realized that the U.S. would not allow him to safeguard these men, he decided to act "on his own responsibility and against his orders, to issue safe conduct to a small group, allowing them to proceed to Munich.[85]

D. THE COSSACKS

As the American turnover of Vlasov's Army was coming to a close, British troops were beginning an unexpectedly grueling ordeal: repatriation of the Cossacks. As described by Bethell, the Cossacks were "members of that strange estate, half way between a nation and a community, which for centuries inhabited southern Russia, at times preserving a certain independence from the Tsar, at other times serving the Tsar loyally and receiving privileges from him."[86]

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[85] *Operation Keelhaul,* p. 70
[86] *The Last Secret,* p.75

At the beginning of the twentieth century there were five million Cossacks in Russia divided into "armies" and administered by a sort of "military self-government." This arrangement effectively afforded the Cossacks the status of a separate military caste within the Russian Empire. When the Bolsheviks came to power they stripped the Cossacks of this status and the privileges that went with it. Consequently, the Cossacks, more than any other group, saw the invasion by Germany as an opportunity to rid Russia of the Communists.

Hitler decided to take advantage of Cossack opposition to the Communists and, considering their long history of rebellion as well as their reputation as fierce fighters, he authorized the formation of Cossack volunteer units to fight the Red Army. At the end of the war several of these units were based a few miles from the Austrian border. Together, with their families, they totaled and estimated 40,000 men, women and children.

In early May, upon hearing the news of Germany's surrender, the Cossacks decided their best chance of survival was to surrender to the approaching British Army. Although the Cossacks were technically under British control, their huge numbers required that Cossack commanders be made responsible for their own internal discipline. Cossack officers retained their side-arms and were given enough rifles to mount a proper guard.

Wary of the Cossacks reputation as ferocious fighters, military authorities decided it was necessary to use trickery to prevent a Cossack revolt. They led the Cossacks to believe that the British Government had plans to employ them in the capacity of a sort of foreign legion. The British troops knew no differently until 24 May when General

Keightley issued an order which read: "It is of the utmost importance that all the officers and particularly senior commanders, are rounded up and that none are allowed to escape. The Soviet forces consider this as being of the highest importance and will probably regard the safe delivery of the officers as a test of British good faith." [87]

When the British first took control of the Cossacks they considered them nothing more than traitors. However, conversations with these people revealed to the soldiers the hardships the Cossacks endured at the hands of the Communists, and the soldiers began to sympathize with their plight. Keightley realized that the order to forcibly repatriate these tens of thousand of apparently harmless people to a government that had driven them away through relentless persecution would not sit well with many of his soldiers.

On 26 May, the camp commanders received the details of the operation they were expected to carry out. One of the commanders, Rusty Davies, remembers, "I was shattered. It was a denial of everything we had ever said to the Cossacks. I couldn't believe it."[88] Davies had immediately developed a relationship of mutual trust and respect with the Cossacks. He had become their guide and adviser, answering their questions and assuring them that they would not would not be returned to the Soviets. Davies immediately asked to be relieved of his duties. However, it was explained to him that precisely because he had the confidence of the Cossacks, he was vital to the success of the mission. Davies was ordered to continue to reassure the prisoners that there was no

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[87] *The Last Secret,* p. 91 [Note: In Keightley's rush to please the Soviets, he had overlooked (or possibly ignored) that many of the Cossacks were old émigrés; they had left Russia prior to 1922 and, therefore, were not Soviet citizens. Since the Yalta Agreement stipulated that "**Soviet citizens**" were to be repatriated, these émigrés were not liable to repatriation under the terms of the Agreement.

[88] Ibid., p. 92

danger of repatriation. In the book, The Sharp End: The Fighting Man in World War II, the author states: "it is one of the abiding truths of World War II that most men did as they were told to the bitter end."[89] And so it was the case with Major Davies. Driven by a sense of duty and respect for authority he felt he had no choice but to follow orders.

The following morning Major Davies was ordered to instruct the Cossack staff that all arms in the possession of their troops be handed in by midday. While this order made the Cossacks uneasy, Davies was able to allay their fears by promising that they would be rearmed with British weapons. Satisfied with this explanation the Cossacks complied. Meanwhile, the British troops received the order to arrest any Cossack soldiers still in possession of arms after 1400. The order stated that possession of unauthorized weapons by the Cossacks warranted the death penalty. Even more distressing to the troops were the following instructions: "If it is necessary to open fire you will do so and you must regard this duty as an operation of war."[90]

Once the Cossacks were disarmed, repatriation operations were set in motion. The members of the Cossack staff were the first to be handed over. In order to accomplish the handover without incident the staff was told that they were to travel to a conference the following day. It was explained that Field-Marshal Alexander wanted to address them personally concerning the decision regarding their future disposal. Despite severe misgivings by some of the leaders, most trusted the Major. He had given his word that they would return to the camp before nightfall. In all there were 1,475 officers who

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[89] Ellis, John. *The Sharp End: The Fighting Man in World War II.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1980, p. 260

[90] *The Secret Betrayal,* p. 170

set off for the "conference." A handful escaped into the woods before the group was loaded onto trucks and sent on their way to Soviet-controlled territory. The Cossack leader, General Domanov, had been instructed to leave ahead of the convoy and drive to the Headquarters of the 36th Infantry Brigade. When he arrived he was greeted by the Brigade Commander, Brigadier Geoffrey Musson who immediately announced to him: " I have received strict orders to hand over the whole of the Cossack Division to the Soviet authorities. I regret to have to tell you this, but the order is categorical. Good day."[91] Domanov and his assistant were then escorted to a car by British soldiers and driven East to join their compatriots.

The British had shown their hand with the repatriation of the Cossack leaders. They now faced the prospect of repatriating approximately 20,000 people who knew their fate. Again it was left to Major Davies to do the dirty work. He called a meeting of all camp inmates at Peggetz the following morning. A British Lieutenant appeared at the meeting and announced, through an interpreter, that the Cossack leaders had betrayed their people and had been arrested; consequently, it had been decided that all Cossacks must return to their homeland.

The Cossacks protested to Major Davies that the majority of them were émigrés, not Soviet citizens. One Cossack asked, "How can you do this? In 1920 the British sent ships to the Dardanelles to rescue us from the Bolsheviks, and now you are handing us back again!"[92] Although Davies sympathized, he had his orders.

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[91] Ibid., p. 175
[92] Ibid., p. 202

Repatriation was to begin on 30 May. However the operations were postponed due to the fact that the Soviets could only receive 2,000 prisoners on the first day. The Cossacks were told the delay was ordered in light of the fact that the following day was the Catholic Feast of Corpus Christi. Once again false hopes were raised. The Cossacks took the postponement as a sign that the British government was wavering in its decision to follow through with their plans of repatriation.

By this time some of the British soldiers could no longer stand silently by as the Cossacks were betrayed for reasons that were not clear to either the British soldiers or the Cossacks. An escapee from the camp, Gregori Schelest, stated that two days before the deportations were to start a British soldier told him what had happened to the Cossack leaders. Schelest explained, "There were a few soldiers who were ready to help us. They told us the truth. I was with my wife and my little boy . . . . So I decided that our only hope was to run away. Hundreds did what I did."[93] A British report stated, "it was impossible to prevent a considerable number of Cossacks and Caucasians from disappearing into the neighboring hills during the ensuing few days."[94]

Unfortunately the majority of the 20,000 continued to hold out hope that the British would not be able to go through with their plan. They addressed a petition to Alec Malcolm, the Commanding Officer of the troops guarding the area. It spoke of their persecution under the Soviet regime and stated that, if the British would not protect them, they preferred death than return to the USSR. There were several other petitions submitted by various groups, as well as individuals. Although Major Davies claims that he

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[93] *The Last Secret*, p. 126
[94] Ibid., p. 126

forwarded them all up through the chain of command, they obviously fell upon deaf ears and political hearts.

While the Cossacks at Peggetz awaited repatriation, other operations had already begun throughout the Drau Valley. A few miles east of Lienz, a group of Caucasians were the first to be sent back. This first operation provided only a glimpse of what was in store for the British troops. Approximately 200 of the group of Caucasians - men, woman and children - had formed into a tight circle and had no intention of moving. The troops had to pry them apart and force them onto the trucks. Many begged to be shot. Finally the Commander of the British troops dealt one of the men a blow to the head with an entrenching tool handle. This action had a "sobering effect" on the rest of the group and the troops were then able to successfully load them on the trucks.[95]

Similar, and even more violent, scenes were repeated throughout the next few days with various groups. With each incident the troops involved were taken by surprise with the resistance of the refugees and disgusted with their assignment. What made the matter worse for the soldiers was that women and children were involved in these operations. In most cases, the officers in charge of the operations were anxious to complete the odious task as quickly as possible which could only be accomplished by a substantial use of force, resulting in brutal and bloody scenes. The Commanding Officer of the 2nd Battalion, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, David Shaw remembered one such incident:

> It was terrible. I remember these women -some of them pregnant - lying on the ground rolling and screaming. My men were putting their rifles on the ground and lifting the women into the train, then

[95] Ibid., p. 130

locking the doors and standing there as the train pulled out with women screaming out of the windows.[96]

Shaw explained the affect this had on his men, "It gave us all a great shock. It was a frightful order to give and there was a lot of feeling among my troops . . . . [but] General Arbuthnott gave me a direct order and I had to carry it out. The men moaned like anything, but in the end they obeyed orders."[97]

The worst scenes of violence happened at the Peggetz Camp. What made these events particularly horrible was the number of women and children involved: 4,000 women and 2,500 children. The Cossacks at Peggetz were determined to show their resolve not to be taken. Early on 1 June approximately four thousand people gathered in the square of the camp for Mass. The Cossack leaders hoped that the British would refuse to break up a religious ceremony. Davies addressed the crowd through an interpreter and told them it was time to begin loading into the trucks. His announcement only served to "tighten up" the crowd. After waiting an hour, Davies admitted to himself that the Cossacks were not going to go voluntarily - he would have to use force.

Armed with clubs and bayonets, the troops advanced on the crowd. As Davies explained, "the people formed themselves into a solid mass, kneeling and crouching with their arms locked around each others' bodies."[98] [LS/136] The soldiers tried pulling individuals away from the crowd to no avail. Some of the soldiers broke away and went over to Davies almost pleading, "They won't go, sir." The Major insisted that orders had to be carried out. The soldiers reluctantly returned to their task. One soldier recalls the

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[96] Ibid., p. 133
[97] Ibid., p. 133
[98] Ibid., p. 136

incident, "We were told that they had done dirty work for the Germans and that we were to regard them as our enemies. But when it came to the point they didn't seem like that. It wasn't a nice job at all."[99]

Once the troops had separated a section of people, they began prying individuals away from the group. A British report on the incident states, "It was necessary to hit the men hard to make them let go."[100] Once an individual was separated, the soldiers threw him or her onto the trucks "like sacks of potatoes."

Finally, as the crowd was pushed further and further back, the fence holding them in the compound gave way. Free from their trap, the Cossacks scattered in all directions. The soldiers' pursued them into the woods where they found several people hanging from trees. Many people sought escape by jumping from a nearby bridge. Soldiers were shocked to see mothers drowning their children and then themselves.

The horror of the scene was taking its toll on the soldiers. Although these were hardened battle troops, they found that using force against women and children was the most despicable duty they had ever been assigned. One officer explained the reaction of some of the soldiers: "One or two of the soldiers just couldn't take it. There were soldiers pushing people along with their rifle-butts - not hammering them but just pushing them - with tears streaming down their faces. It was the only time I ever saw an Argyll and Sutherland Highlander in tears."[101]

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[99] Ibid., p. 137
[100] Ibid., p. 140
[101] Ibid., p. 145

Despite their disgust over their mission, the troops continued at it for four hours. By that point they had managed to load 1,252 people on the train. This was 500 less than ordered. Colonel Malcolm, the officer in charge of the Highlanders, stopped operations at this point in light of the number of injuries inflicted. However, similar operations continued throughout the area. In all, 6,500 Cossacks were sent to the East that day.

Colonel Malcolm reported to his superior officer that evening and told him that he did not want to repeat the operation the next day. Malcolm, like Davies before him, was told he must fulfill his duty. However, the will of the Cossacks was broken and resistance was minimal for the remaining operations.

1. Moral Decisions

As was the case for Colonel Malcolm, once was enough for many of the officers in charge of these cruel missions. However, unlike Malcolm, several commanders made the decision that that they would not, nor would they force their troops to, participate in such detestable work. One such commander was Captain J.S. Lowe of the 12th Honourable Artillery Company. Lowe's troops had an experience similar to those previously described. Ordered to repatriate 300 Cossacks to Judenburg, the soldiers had resorted to using a flame-thrower to encourage the Cossacks to get into the trucks. When the convoy escorts arrived back in camp they reported to the Captain that four Cossacks had committed suicide on the trip. Lowe complained to his superior, Brigadier Clive Usher, who immediately cancelled all further transports. Lowe's rationale was simple: "We all

felt very strongly about it after that one day, what with the flame-thrower and the suicides, so we virtually said, 'Not again.'"[102]

Lieutenant John Greig, a member of the 46th Reconnaissance Regiment, adopted a similar attitude. The difference was that Greig did not wait to put his men or the Cossacks through a bloody battle before deciding that repatriation was wrong. Instead he responded to the pleas of the Cossacks and the protests of his men. Greig explained the situation as follows:

> They [The Cossacks] told us they were frightened of being sent back to Russia, but we said, "Oh no, the British would never do such a thing." Then we got this order that in three days they were all to be handed back. We were shattered. Our men kept coming to us and saying, "Look, these Cossacks say they're going to be sent back and they'll be shot." But until we got the order we didn't believe it could happen. . . . I'd never seen my blokes quite as shaken as they were over that particular incident.[103]

Greig decided the only honorable thing to do was to tell the Cossacks what was to happen. Soon after they received the news, the Cossacks began to melt away. Obviously, nothing was done to stop them. Ironically many of the Cossacks chose to stay anyway, not believing the British would actually go through with repatriation. In the end, Greig and his troops were forced to repatriate those who had stayed behind.

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[102] Ibid., p. 134
[103] Ibid., p. 106

V. DISHONORABLE DUTY

The Americans returned to Plattling visibly shamefaced. . . . On their return, even the SS men in a neighbouring compound lined the wire fence and railed at them for their behaviour. The Americans were too ashamed to reply.

Nikolai Tolstoy
from The Secret Betrayal

A. SETTING THE EXAMPLE

Neither General Patton nor Field Marshall Alexander approved of the policy of repatriation from the start, and they let their opinions be known. However, rather than blatantly refusing to obey orders, they employed other, perhaps more effective, methods of avoiding forced repatriation. Field Marshall Alexander adopted the strategy of delay, as will be discussed later. General Patton approached the matter more directly. In mid-June 1945, when mass repatriation was just beginning, Patton simply disregarded existing policy and released 5,000 Soviet POWs. Interestingly enough, there were no repercussions resulting from their actions. Most likely, the Foreign Office and Washington feared the publicity any disciplinary actions against such highly regarded leaders might bring to the repatriation operations.

While men such as Patton could get away with blatant disregard of orders, the majority of the military knew it would be wisest to take a more subtle approach. Perhaps emboldened by the example of their top leaders many U.S. commanders came to handle repatriation orders on the basis of what one Eisenhower staffer called a "loose field

policy." This euphemism covered an unwritten rule of thumb whereby U.S. officers, so inclined, allowed DPs, POWs, even ex-Vlasovites to disappear, and resorted to force only under pressure.[104]

B. JUSTIFICATION FOR REPATRIATION

The Allied governments justified their policy of forced repatriation by downplaying the issue of force and explaining resisting repatriates away as traitors. The media greatly assisted in this effort. A *New York Times* article implied that Soviet traitors deserved what was coming to them. It referred to "10,000 to 50,000 Russian traitors who are being held as prisoner of war and presumably will ultimately face Soviet justice."[105] Another *New York Times* article headed *Russia Aids Former Captives,* provided the public with an idea of the welcome received by Soviet repatriates:

> Former Russian prisoners of all ranks enjoy the same privileges as demobilized soldiers and officers A. Slesaryev, legal adviser to the Council for Repatriation, announced today. All repatriated persons are to receive quarters and fuel. District and rural Soviet executive committees are to [provide] help to former prisoners in finding work. Repatriated invalids are entitled to pensions.[106]

For the most part, newspaper articles presented repatriation operations as just another military accomplishment: neither good nor bad. A 25 January 1946 *New York Times* article reported that "2,738,186 displaced persons from Allied and former enemy

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[104] *Pawns of Yalta,* p. 106

[105] *New York Times,* 6 September 1945

[106] *New York Times,* 23 Oct 1945 [Note: This article is not false, just intentionally misleading. Everyone was transported in trains (fuel provided) to forced labor camps (housing & work provided), where they were all mistreated equally. And while invalids may have been *entitled* to a pension, that didn't mean they received one.

countries have been repatriated from the American occupation zone from V-E Day to Jan 21." The mention of resistance is conspicuously absent. Even more disturbing is the fact that several articles treat the forced repatriation of Soviets as an accepted fact, not worthy of either question or investigation. This excerpt from the 9 June 1945 article on "Displaced Persons" is typical of how forced repatriation was presented as a normal situation: "The organisation United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA)] is bound by its charter not to send anyone back to a country to which he does not wish to go. Only the Russians are sent home without reference to their personal views."[107]

The same mindset existed within the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). Whether because they actually believed it, or merely needed the troops to believe it, the JCS routinely referred to Soviets who fought with the Reich as "traitors." The ploy worked - at least for a while. In interviews conducted with American soldiers who took part in repatriation activities, most admitted that they were upset by the brutal treatment the Russians received from the Red Army, but added that it was to be expected because these men were traitors.[108]

Even if British and U.S. diplomats, as well as the military leadership, understood the realities which forced Soviets into service with the Reich, they felt confident there would be no public outcry against forced repatriation. As long as the British and American public was ignorant of the facts, forced repatriation could continue unabated. However, while it was relatively easy to keep the public in the dark, it was not so with the

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[107] *Economist,* 06 September 1945

[108] *The Last Secret. The Secret Betrayal. Pawns of Yalta*

troops. Forced repatriation operations provided Allied soldiers with a crash course in Communism, Stalin-style. This course took them quickly through the stages of unawareness, disbelief, confusion, acceptance, protest, and finally, revolt.

C. THE EDUCATION OF THE TROOPS

From the beginning, the Allied troops were confronted with signs that they had not been given the whole story concerning the Soviets. British officer Lieutenant Michael Bayley explains his awakening to the fact that not all Soviets were anxious to return to the Motherland:

> We had to go round the farms to collect the Russians who had been working as labourers on the farms - mostly old men and women, and were amazed and somewhat perplexed to have people who had literally been slaves on German farms, falling on their knees in front of you and begging to be allowed to stay, and crying bitterly - not with joy - when they were told they were being sent back to Russia . . . We could not understand this, but when talking about it to Poles . . . from their armoured Division - we were told that of course the Russian peasants were better off in Germany - why couldn't we let well alone.[109]

The repatriates were not the only ones to educate the troops. The Soviet authorities provided an all too clear picture of what it meant to return to the Soviet Union. Whereas, at first, the troops tended to look upon the repatriates' fears of returning as a touch of paranoia, allied soldiers assigned to turn over these unfortunates were confronted with indisputable evidence that the repatriates' fears were horrifyingly warranted. In his book The Secret Betrayal, Nikolai Tolstoy recounts the scene of one of the first

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[109] *The Secret Betrayal,* p. 313

debarkations of Soviet citizens as told by a British officer who participated in the operation:

> The convoy reached Odessa in the first week of March 1945. . . . NKVD men with tommy-guns flanked the stumbling and bewildered little columns. Then they were gone. . . . Suddenly a deep roar filled the air, as two bombers appeared in the sky and circled slowly round and round the harbour. The sailors ducked instinctively, then straightened up as they saw the red stars of the Soviet Air Force on the wings. . . . And no sooner had the curious watchers become accustomed to the noise, than another harsher, more tearing and strident mechanical shrieking opened up in competition. A mobile sawing-mill, drawn up on the quayside, was being put to work. . . . The inferno continued without abatement for about twenty minutes, and the purposeless circling of the aircraft and screeching of the mechanical saws seemed to reverberate the ether around. Filled with horror, young Lieutenant Lieven ran to the British colonel who had come to supervise the return of former British prisoners of war on the same ship. . . .
>
> '*Sir, sir, they are murdering the prisoners!*' stammered Lieven, consumed with agitation.
>
> 'No, no, that's impossible!' shouted Colonel Dashwood confidently above the all-pervading cacophony.
>
> Lieven insisted he was right but, realising the futility of protest under such conditions (what could Colonel Dashwood do?) made his way below, sick and horrified.[110]

As the repatriation operations went on, the Soviets abandoned their crude attempts to hide their brutal treatment of the repatriates. There are far too many eye-witness accounts of horrific acts perpetrated by the Soviet authorities against their returning citizens to recount in this thesis. However, the following incident, described by a British officer, is typical of the scenes reported more and more frequently by Allied soldiers.

> There were thousands of DPs in camps in the area, who were 'screened' in batches by a Soviet Repatriation Commission. The 'screening' was conducted in a very arbitrary fashion in a disused church, after which those chosen were despatched in British trucks to the Soviet Zone. The horrified drivers reported to Major Wolfe

[110] Ibid., pp. 129-130

> on their return that they had witnessed the massacre of all prisoners (male and female) over the age of sixty and under sixteen. Many small children were done to death in this way.[111]

Quite often, once members of a unit had witnessed such a scene, the "loose field policy" to which Eisenhower referred was immediately employed in that unit. Captain Smith, an Artillery officer in the British Army, explained how during the winter of 1945-1946 members of his unit reported back to him with a story similar to that mentioned above. Smith immediately began a campaign to frustrate the intentions of the Soviets. "When we knew which area we were visiting the next day, we sent someone the night before (unknown to the Russians and indeed to my own Colonel) to warn the men to be absent, as technically they had to answer for their women and children. So we made many abortive visits, to the anger of the Russian officer."[112]

During the mass repatriation operations, the American troops were spared the scenes which had so disturbed the British soldiers. However, the Americans were not spared all unpleasantness and they began to resent their duties more and more. A former American officer explained his assignment over the summer of 1945 as follows:

> I was one of several artillery officers in the 102nd Infantry Division who was detailed to lead a convoy of all the trucks in my battalion on the mission of picking up Russian PoWs from German internment camps and delivering them to the Russian official at Chemnitz. For about two weeks day and night I led about seventeen trucks on shuttle service all over Germany and France on this mission. There were thousands of other trucks doing the same. We soon found out that many Russians didn't want to be repatriated and we soon found out why. They believed that any officer PoW would faced execution upon return and any non-com PoW would face a term in Siberia. As

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[111] Ibid., p. 482
[112] Ibid., p. 315

a result we stood over them with guns and our orders were to shoot to kill if they tried to escape from our convoy. Needless to say many of them did risk death to effect their escape.[113]

D. THE MILITARY REACTS

By mid-June 1945, the protests from British and American soldiers about the treatment of Soviet DPs, as well as their own role in forcing these people to go back to such unspeakable horror, began to stream in. Their superiors forwarded these complaints, in addition to their own, up the chain of command. Despite the harrowing accounts of massacres and maltreatment received by the British government, the Foreign Office never wavered in its decision to carry out forced repatriation of all Soviet citizens, without exception.

The U.S. Government was a bit more responsive to the complaints of its military. U.S. Field Commanders manifested their dissatisfaction with the vagueness of the Agreement from the very beginning. On 17 February, six days after the Agreement had been signed, the Supreme Allied Command Mediterranean Theater, asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff for clarification "particularly as it relates to Baltic nationals and eastern Poles".[114] On 9 March, Washington promulgated its official policy on the matter which stated that refugees from territories that had been annexed by the USSR during the war were not to be handed over. It stood firm by this decision despite continual protests from the Soviets.[115]

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[113] Ibid., 323
[114] *Pawns of Yalta,* p. 103
[115] This one exemption accounted for 42 percent of all nonreturners.

Other clarifications were added throughout the spring of 1945. Civilian defectors within U.S. territory were ruled not eligible for deportation based on the fact that the U.S. and the USSR had no extradition treaty. Washington also exempted approximately 40,000 Soviet civilians liberated prior to the signing of the Yalta Agreement who were cared for by French and Belgian officials. By August 1945 the U.S. Military had fought for, and won, additional categories of exemption: Soviet women married to citizens of other Allied powers and old émigrés - persons who had left Russia prior to the beginning of World War II. This last category is one that the U.S. failed to recognize time and time again. In fact, many of the Cossack soldiers had left Russia as early as 1919, and therefore were never Soviet citizens. Yet they were sent back.

Up to mid-summer 1945, the Americans had been spared the barbaric scenes that had become all too common to the British troops. However, the repatriation of Vlasov's Army and the scene described earlier by an American Officer had greatly disturbed all ranks of the military. An ever-growing number of U.S. commanders began asking for clarification of the repatriation policy with a tone of protest.

By the late spring and early summer of 1945 reports of "stern treatment" of repatriated Soviets began filtering in to Washington. In order to determine the validity of these complaints, Secretary of State Stettinius queried Ambassador Harriman in Moscow about the treatment of returning prisoners. On 11 June 1945, Ambassador Harriman submitted his report.

> While Embassy has no evidence to support reports of stern treatment of Soviet citizens repatriated from Allied occupied areas, it would be unwise to discount the general basis for these reports. . . . Although repatriation of liberated Soviet citizens has now been proceeding for

> months, Embassy knows of only a single instance in which a repatriated prisoner has returned to his home and family in Moscow . . . This man was suffering from tuberculosis and was released after being held under guard in camp near Moscow for four months. It is known that repatriates are met at ports of entry by police guard and marched off to unknown destinations. Trainloads of repatriates are passing through Moscow and continuing east, passengers being held incommunicado hile trains stand in Moscow yards. Although little info is available, it is believed that repatriates are first subjected to an intense screening by police. . . . It is quite possible that persons considered guilty of deliberate desertion or anti-state activity are being shot, while some few with good war records who have been captured when severely wounded or under similar circumstances and have refused service with Germans may be released to return home. Great bulk of repatriates, however, are probably being placed in forced labor battalions and used in construction projects in Urals, Central Asia, Siberia or Far North under police supervision.[116]

On the same day Harriman's report was received, the U.S. queried the Moscow Embassy of the United States about "whether any decrees were issued by the Soviet Government during the was divesting Soviet nationals of their citizenship because they were captured by the enemy . . . ." [117] This inquiry indicates that the U.S. may have been seeking a legal loophole to the policy of forced repatriation.

Without waiting for the reply from the Embassy, the U.S. decided to go ahead with a plan to repatriate 118 Soviets who had expressed strong opposition to being repatriated, and who had been knowledgeable enough to claim that their German uniforms entitled them to treatment as German prisoners of war. These men had been among those shipped over to the United States shortly after D-Day. The U.S. initially honored their claims for protection. On 5 May Secretary Grew had informed the Soviet Government that the U.S. would not force their return. However just days after Germany surrendered,

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[116] *The Secret Betrayal,* pp. 323-324
[117] Ibid., p. 324

Secretary Grew wrote to the Secretary of the Navy, Admiral Forrestal, recommending that the men be handed over to the Soviets:

> I assume, now that Germany has unconditionally surrendered, that all American prisoners of war held by German armed forces have been liberated and that therefore there no longer exists any danger that the German authorities will take reprisals against American prisoners of war. I therefore believe that it would be advisable to turn over these 118 persons to the Soviet authorities for repatriation to the Soviet Union, as well as any other persons of similar status who may be found in United States custody in the future.[118]

Although the fear of German reprisals was replaced by gone, it had been replaced by the knowledge that soon hundreds of thousands of American POWs would fall into Red Army hands. Secretary Grew was anxious not to give the Soviets any reason to hold these men. On 18 May, the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee approved Grew's suggestion.

The State Department's legal advisor objected to the action from both a legal and moral standpoint. He argued that, from a moral standpoint, the Geneva accord's "true spirit and intent" was being violated: "From beginning to end, the convention contains provisions for the welfare of prisoners of war, based upon the dictates of humanity and decency. I find nothing in the Convention which required or justifies this Government in sending the unfortunate Soviet nationals in question to Russia, where they will almost certainly be liquidated."[119] From a legal standpoint, he pointed out that the treaty applied as between belligerent parties and therefore could not "properly be invoked as between the United States and the Soviet Union."[120]

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[118] Ibid., p. 325
[119] *Pawns of Yalta,* p. 87
[120] Ibid., p. 87

The State Department's assigned the Special War Problems Division to devise a way to get around this provision. He offered the following solution: "The obligation under the Geneva Prisoners of War Convention to repatriate prisoners of war provides a way out via repatriation to Germany where our military authorities (to satisfy Yalta) will be able to turn them [Soviet citizens] over to the Soviet authorities."[121]

Comforted by the solution from the Special War Problems Division as well as the relatively benign report received from Ambassador Harriman, the U.S. gathered the original 118 claimants to German nationality, together with 36 further claimants, and moved them to a wired compound on the Fort Dix Army Base in New Jersey. The Soviets were informed that on the afternoon of 29 June 1945 they were to be embarked on a ship destined for the USSR. The repatriation of these 154 men would introduce the brutality of the policy of forced repatriation to the American public for the first time and would steel the military's resolve to take matters into its own hands.

E. INCIDENT AT FORT DIX

On 29 June 1945 a full fledged riot broke out when guards at Fort Dix began preparations for transferring 154 Russian prisoners for passage to Germany. Inmates tried unsuccessfully to provoke the guards to fire on them. When that failed, the prisoners barricaded themselves in their barracks and tried to set it on fire. They were forced out of the barracks with tear gas. Armed with the legs of tables and chairs as well as utensils taken from their mess kits, the desperate prisoners rushed a group of guards. The guards

[121] Ibid., p. 87

opened fire, wounding seven men. It took at least thirty minutes to restore order. During the struggle two other prisoners suffered serious lacerations from trying to escape through the barbed wire fence. When enough calm was restored that the soldiers could enter the smoking barracks to put out the fire, they discovered three bodies swinging from the rafters. Fifteen additional nooses had been strung up.

Unmoved by the Soviets' desperate acts, the U.S. ordered that the camp commander proceed with the repatriation operation. The next day the Soviets were transported to New York to board a ship bound for Europe. They were escorted by 200 U.S. guards. The pier entrance was blocked by eighty military police armed with submachine guns. Just as the prisoners prepared to board, the commander of the escort suddenly received a new order. The embarkation was cancelled and the men were to return to Fort Dix. No explanation was given for the change in plans. Extra precautions were taken in an effort to avoid a repeat of the events of the previous day. "On their return to Fort Dix the men were taken to the prisoner-of-war compound and quartered in barracks stripped of furniture with only mattresses to sleep on. They were also divested of all clothing that might be used in a suicide attempt." [122]

The entire incident was embarrassing to both the U.S. and Soviet governments. The U.S. had been caught by its public in the act of forcing people to return to their country under armed guard. And the U.S. press had reported that the Soviet citizens preferred death to repatriation. In an effort to mask the real reason behind the armed guard, the Soviets accused the United States of using force to prevent the return of its

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[122] *New York Times,* 1 July 1945

citizens. The U.S. ordered an investigation into the cause of the riot as a means of appeasing the Soviet Government and, undoubtedly, to buy time in order to let the situation cool down in the press. As expected, the investigation showed that the riot was a result of the inmates' fear of repatriation.

On 11 July, based on the results of the investigation, the State Department again declared that the Soviets would have to be repatriated, using force if necessary. It ordered that the prisoners be screened to verify each man's classification as a "Soviet citizen." Seven were found to be mistakenly classified as such. Fearing the unfavorable publicity a second incident might provoke, on 23 July Secretary Grew ordered a second round of interviews. No changes were made to any of the remaining inmates' classification as a result of these interviews.

While this round of re-screenings was taking place, the prisoners addressed petitions for asylum to General Marshall and the International Red Cross. Political Advisor, Alexander Kirk requested that action be withheld pending the State Department's reactions to these petitions. Secretary of States Byrnes replied that, "in conformity with the commitment taken at Yalta" all Soviet citizens were to be returned." Finally, on 31 August, under conditions of the utmost secrecy, the Soviets were handed over to the Red Army in Germany. Documents state that the operation went "without incident. Thus, the final chapter of the repatriation from Fort Dix went by without public scrutiny. However, there was now one group who was perfectly aware of forcible repatriation and its implications: the soldiers to whom the distasteful task was allocated.

By now the soldiers had seen, or heard, every side of the story. In different ways, the Soviet prisoners and the Red Army had educated them about the brutality of the Soviet Regime. The prisoners had done so by relating their past experiences or, on occasion, showing the Allied soldiers their physical reminders of NKVD "investigations." The Red Army had done so by their rude treatment of their British and American allies and the torture and killing of their own citizens. Lastly, their own governments had shown them that the freedom for which they had so desperately fought, could be denied in the interest of political expediency.

The military had reached a turning point. Their leaders had failed them. Their only recourse was to take matters into their own hands.

VI. THE SOLDIERS PROTEST

Forced repatriation . . . was very difficult and bitterly opposed by the rank and file. We felt then, and still do, that [the Soviets] surrendered to us, were our prisoners-of-war . . . and that those not wishing to return should not have been forced to.

ex-sergeant, Patton's 3rd Army

A. FIELD-MARSHAL ALEXANDER RESISTS

The Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean area at the time was Field-Marshal Alexander. Alexander was appalled when he heard of the scenes of carnage that took place with the Cossack repatriations. He resolved that such scenes would never again occur under his command.

Two weeks later he received word that 55 Soviet citizens, including 16 women and 11 children were refusing to return to the Soviet Union. Alexander sent a telegram to the Foreign Office which read in part:

> One. 55 Soviet citizens including 16 women 11 children majority of whom state they are political refugees screened in accordance with terms of Yalta agreement are refusing to return willingly to Soviet Union.
> Two. Soviet Mission have requested their transfer. This would require use of force including handcuffs and travel under escort in locked box-cars.
> Three. We believe that the handing over of these individuals would almost certainly involve their death.
> Four. There are likely to be many more such cases.
> Five. Request your ruling earliest possible as to how these personnel should be disposed of as local Soviet Mission will certainly press for them to be handed over.[123]

[123] *The Secret Betrayal*, p. 329

By requesting a ruling on the matter, Alexander was forcing the Foreign Office to acknowledge the fact that (1) inhumane measures would be necessary to impel these people to return, (2) their return would "almost certainly" result in their death, and (3) ruling in favor of repatriation in this case would condemn more than just these fifty-five to a horrible fate, but also all those who came after.

The British Government had announced the policy of forced repatriation and then left the military to carry it out. Alexander must have expected, or at least hoped, that by confronting the Foreign Office with the consequences of its policy, it might revise its interpretation of the Agreement. Yet, once again, the British Government remained immovable. The Foreign Office was completely unsympathetic to the Soviets' fate. It insisted that the 55 must go back. The only problem the Foreign Office foresaw was that, since the Mediterranean area was under joint command, American agreement had to be secured. Dean's primary concern was that the Americans might be "tender as regards Soviet women and children who are not strictly P/W." [124]

The military adamantly objected to the return of these refugees. The War Office informed the Foreign Office that Allied Force Headquarters (AFHQ) in Italy had suggested that it might be difficult to persuade British soldiers to force people into trains "who did not want to go back to their country and who might be done in when they got there."[125] In an attempt to appease the military, the Foreign Office suggested that the Soviets provide an armed guard to apply "any necessary measures of constraint."

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[124] Ibid., p. 329
[125] Ibid., p. 329

While this debate raged, 500 Cossacks had been rounded up in Austria. These Cossacks consisted primarily of people who had escaped during the Drau Valley operations. Field-Marshal Alexander telegraphed the Foreign Office to notify them of this new development and request instructions on how to proceed. The Foreign Office felt that the Americans would go along with the repatriation of the Cossacks but not of the other 55. During a meeting on the issue, Thomas Brimelow argued that, despite the fact "that this policy is an embarrassment in view of its variance with H.M.G.'s long-established policy in regard to political refugees" he believed that POWs (the Cossacks) and Displaced Persons (the refugees) should be "treated alike, and handed over to the Russian authorities whether they are willing to return or not." Major-General A.V. Anderson retorted that he felt that "the Yalta Agreement was designed to arrive at a working arrangement for the repatriation of liberated Soviet nationals, not that it was intended to ensure the forcible repatriation of political refugees, who are guiltless of pro-Axis activities, and who do not wish to return to Russia." [126]

General Anderson then asked for a ministerial ruling. Instead, the new Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, ruled on his own that all should go back. Christopher Warner, head of the Northern Department of the Foreign Office, informed General Anderson that the decision was final. He ended his correspondence: "In view of this *ministerial ruling*, we presume that you will not be referring the matter to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, and that you will now be able to proceed with the transfer of these people."[127] (italics added)

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[126] Ibid., p. 331
[127] Ibid., 340

As far as the Foreign Office was concerned the matter was resolved, however the military had other ideas.

At the same time that Warner was writing to Anderson, Major-General Y.D. Basilov, the Soviet Special Delegate on Repatriation Matters, was meeting with Alexander. Basilov not only demanded the return of the 500 Cossacks and 55 refugees, he insisted that Alexander repatriate 10,000 prisoners held in at camp at Cinecettà, Italy. The Soviets knew that these prisoners were Ukrainians, predominately of Polish nationality. Alexander was fed up with Soviet bullying. He informed Basilov that his orders precluded the surrender of persons who were living outside the 1939 frontiers of the USSR as they were not considered Soviet citizens and added that he was not authorized to repatriate people against their will.

Immediately following the meeting, Alexander wrote to the Chief of the Imperial Staff, Sir Alan Brooke, stating that he would refuse to use force to repatriate Soviet citizens until he was given a direct order to do so. He also sent another request to the War Office for instructions. He attached a memo to the request, parts of which read:

> To compel [the Soviets] to accept repatriation would certainly either involve the use of force or driving them into railway coaches at the point of the bayonet and thereafter locking them in, possibly also handcuffing a number of them.
>
> Such treatment, coupled with the knowledge that these individuals are being sent to an almost certain death, is quite out of keeping with the principles of democracy and justice as we know them. Furthermore, it is most unlikely that the British soldier, knowing the fate to which these people are being committed, will be a willing participant in the measures required to compel their departure . . . . In view of the circumstances I recommend that

> efforts be made to obtain some modification of the Agreement which would allow these people to be treated as stateless persons for the time being. The matter is urgent.[128]

It was now August and the situation was at a stalemate. The Soviet Government continued to push the Foreign Office for action. The Foreign Office continually reassured the Soviets that the policy had not changed. And the Military leaders dug in.

B. THE SOLDIERS REBEL

The military leadership was not only opposed to the policy of forced repatriation because they disagreed with it in principle. They were also concerned about their own soldiers. By this time protests were pouring in from those who had to implement this policy. Troop morale had taken a drastic plunge among the units that had participated in repatriation operations. In 1977, an ex-sergeant in Patton's Third Army later described the general feeling among the troops: "Forced repatriation . . . was very difficult and bitterly opposed by the rank-and-file. We felt then, and still do, that they surrendered to us, were our Prisoners-of-War, should have been processed by us and that those who chose to return to Russia should have been returned, and that those *not* wishing to return should not have been forced to."[129] Soldiers developed a defiant attitude against the orders they found so offensive. Upon hearing of the fate of the Cossacks in Austria, British officers guarding a group of Ukrainians protested to the authorities that their prisoners should not be handed over to the Soviets. The Captain in Charge of the Unit

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[128] *The Last Secret*, p. 179
[129] *Pawns of Yalta*, p. 105

was so furious at the prospect of them being returned that he fired off a message to AFHQ headquarters which ended, "If order carried out, please send burial party." [130]

Commanders were finding it more and more difficult to deal with their rude and demanding Russian counterparts. Their intense dislike of the Soviet representatives only hardened these commanders' resolve to frustrate Soviet efforts to obtain the return of all Soviet citizens. Colonel Alex Wilkinson was in charge of several DP camps in Steiermark. Soon after taking control of these camps he received a visit from NKVD officers who insisted that Wilkinson return 1,500 inmates from one of his camps. Wilkinson provided Tolstoy with an account of his dealings with these men. The tone of his account is demonstrates the Allied soldiers' resentment of the Soviet representatives bullying manner.

> It was not long before a couple of NKVD officers from Vienna called on me in Graz, called my attention to the Yalta Agreement, and told me that I was to put them [the inmates] on a train and send them to Vienna. The Yalta Agreement made no appeal to me, and I told the Russians that I would do as they said, but *only* if the DPs were *willing* to go. These two bastards then rang Vienna, and within an hour or so told me that I was to put the DPs on the train. To which I gave the same answer.
>
> They then said they would like to go and talk to them, to which I agreed. I then notified the DPs what was on and told them that the meeting was at 1000 hrs next day. So off went the NKVD bastards to do their stuff. The meeting took place at 1000 hrs, but only 15 of the DPs attended it. The Russians returned to Graz and were not very amiable, blaming me for it. All they got out of me was that *if* the 15 who turned up at the meeting *wanted* to go back to Russia, I would see what could be done. In fact, I heard nothing more of it.[131]

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[130] *The Secret Betrayal*, p. 334
[131] Ibid., p. 341

The "loose field policy" that had taken effect as a result of the soldiers' resentment over the entire situation was detrimental to good order and discipline. An incident that occurred in Rome as early as November 1944 is illustrative of the look-the-other-way security policy that was becoming more and more prevalent. During that month, forty-seven Soviets, due to be transferred to a Soviet camp, refused to get into the waiting trucks. All were able to escape without much effort. That night the ex-prisoners re-entered the camp to collect their possessions. On their way out, they stole a seven-ton truck which was parked inside the compound. They crashed down the main gate and were never heard from again. Naturally this infuriated the Soviet Government, which suspected the guards of allowing, if not assisting in, the escape.

The following May, approximately 100 DPs remained in the camp. The Area Commander made no attempt to hide the fact that he would be quite pleased to see the remainder "disappear." There were no restrictions placed on the inmates' comings and goings. In fact, the Ukrainian Catholic community in Rome provided a refuge for many. British Officer, Denis Hills who served as the Russian interpreter at the camp, commented that when he would call on the *Russikom* Center, he would see many of his "old friends" walking around.[132]

The soldiers sensed that their lack of vigilance on duty (normally a serious violation) would go unpunished. They were right. Only one British Officer had been court-martialed for not following orders in connection with repatriation duties. His punishment had no deterrent effect on the rest of the troops.

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[132] Ibid., p. 330

At Peggetz, even Major Davies had adopted a new attitude. After the first wave of repatriation operations was complete, he had been given the job of screening new from old émigrés. Davies hated this new assignment and did what he could to allow as many people to escape or register as non-Soviet citizens under false papers.[133]

Some officers were so disgusted that they did not bother with pretense or subterfuge to avoid orders. Colonel Laurence Shadwell was one such officer. As the Commanding Officer of the 506th Military Government Relief Detachment of BAOR at Kiel, he was responsible for a number of large DP camps in the region. A convinced Christian he made it clear that he would not allow forced repatriation. In order to prevent Shadwell from pushing the issue, military authorities did not require him to do so. He was not the only officer to make this quiet arrangement with his superiors.

The resistance to the policy was also becoming more blatant in the U.S. military. According to a Foreign Office report, American General Paul Parens had "acted on instructions from higher military authority" when he over "several thousand" Soviets captured in German uniform.[134] In Germany, 21 of 25 soldiers assigned to repatriation duty reported to sick call in order to avoid their assignment.[135]

Petitions began to come in from civilians as well. John Gray, a Quaker working with a civilian relief team directed an urgent appeal to the Foreign Secretary. He had heard rumors that on 3 August military authorities had received an order to hand over all Soviet citizens. He pointed out that these people were threatening suicide. Gray asserted

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[133] Ibid., p. 330
[134] Ibid., p. 331
[135] *Pawns of Yalta,* p. 105

that forced repatriation was contrary "to the liberal English tradition toward refugees to forcibly transfer these people.", and reported that UNRRA and Red Cross leaders were horrified by the policy. He urged Secretary Bevin "to have this matter investigated and a more humane and Christian solution found to the problem of these homeless people."[136] The Foreign Office responded to Quaker by saying that the matter had been a "misunderstanding."

What could be done about this wide-scale revolt? If punishment was the answer, whom to punish? Entire divisions? Camp Commanders? Clearly punishment would only cause further resentment. Worse yet, it would almost certainly call press attention to the policy and its consequent problems. The fact that now civilians were aware of the situation caused the Allied governments great distress. In order to continue operations, the U.S. and Britain knew that they had to keep public opinion on their side.

During the repatriation of the Cossacks from Austria, the British used "propaganda" on their troops to convince them that forced repatriation was just. Commanding Officers were given a lengthy speech to address to their men, parts of which read as follows:

> This will be an extremely difficult task. . . . . Particularly as there are so many women and children, some of you will feel sympathetic towards these people, but you must remember that they took up arms for the Germans, thus releasing more troops to fight against us in Italy and on the other fronts. There is no doubt that they sided with the Germans because they expected to regain power in Russia. When they saw that this was not possible they tried to excuse themselves in our eyes.
>
> *The Russians have said that they intend to put these people to work on the land and to educate them to be decent Soviet citizens. There is no indication that there will be a massacre of these people.*

[136] *The Secret Betrayal.*, p. 343

> *In fact the Russians need more people for their country.* . . . You have a very big task and a very unpleasant one. Let us try to carry it out firmly without bloodshed, but if it is necessary to resort to force do so promptly and without fear. I will support you in any reasonable action you take.[137] (italics added)

That approach may have had some success during the first wave of operations, but by July, the troops had seen too much. Claims that the Soviets wouldn't massacre their own people were no longer credible. By mid-summer 1945 everyone understood that "putting people to work on the land" meant long sentences in a Siberian labor camp. Other methods of obtaining the soldiers' cooperation would have to be found.

One of the methods chosen was to use "green" troops and to keep them in the dark about the mission. Young soldiers would be less inclined to disobey an order or, at least, it would take them longer to work up the courage to disobey, no matter how offensive the job. One ex-GI explained how he was "recruited" for repatriation duty. He recalled that his company and a few others had been pulled for a rare, full-scale inspection. "No one passed - no one was supposed to." As a result they were all assigned to a "special detail." In an interview almost forty years later, his resentment was still fierce: "Nobody knew a damn thing; they tricked us." It wasn't until the GIs arrived at a train station that they learned they had drawn guard duty on a POW train bound for Czechoslovakia. The soldiers were perplexed about why POWs bound for home required such a heavy guard. Eventually they were told that these rather high-ranking officers had fought for the Germans, but that was as far as the explanation went.

The scene on the train was bleak. The U.S. authorities had taken every precaution to prevent suicides. The POWs had been issued shirts and pants, but no shoes and no

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[137] *The Last Secret,* p. 109

belts. Desperate for escape, "some tried to set fire to their boxcars; some bared their chests pleading with GIs to shoot them. One POW somehow cut his throat."[138] When they reached the border, several Red Army guards got on each car and screamed at the prisoners, all the while brandishing machine guns at them. The GI painfully recalled that sending back the Soviets "dead or alive" was "an awful sight." However, there he was, a young GI, not long out of bootcamp. What could he do? As far as he was concerned he had no choice but to follow orders. "If you didn't it'd be your hide I suppose."[139]

Another advantage of bringing in fresh troops, was that they had not spent any time with the prisoners. They had not had the chance to come to know the prisoners, to hear their stories of persecution, to develop feelings of sympathy for them. The troops who came into the situation "cold" had been briefed that the Soviets were traitors, and had no reason to believe otherwise.

Evidence suggests that the U.S. stood-up specially trained units for the later repatriation operations. These units served as a kind of quick-strike force. They entered the scene suddenly, in large numbers, and weren't afraid to use force. This was the technique used in the final operations and it proved very effective. The combination of these methods served its purpose. The Allies were able to carry out further repatriation operations, but not before a temporary halt was called to the policy.

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[138] *Pawns of Yalta,* p. 91
[139] Ibid., p. 92

C. INCIDENT AT FORT KEMPTEN

During the stand-off between the War Office and the Foreign Office, the repatriation of the prisoners from Camp Kempten in Germany was reaffirmation to privates and generals alike that forced repatriation was wrong. Camp Kempten housed approximately one thousand Soviet and Cossack prisoners who had fought on the German side. Some of them were old émigrés, but several hundred had come from the USSR only a year or two earlier and thus were subject to repatriation.

A Soviet-American Commission was set up to determine who qualified as a citizen. The prisoners did their best to conceal their origins and show solidarity. However, by enlisting the cooperation of the Senior Soviet Officer in the camp, the commission was able to compile a fairly accurate list consisting of approximately 410 prisoners.

On 22 June, those who qualified as Soviet citizens were told to prepare for transfer to a camp closer to Munich. The prisoners were terrified. They made it clear to the soldiers that they would rather be shot dead on the spot than go back to the USSR. The American Commander, Major Legrand, was not aware of the Yalta Agreement and decided to cancel the movement. However, he was soon informed by higher authority that, as per the Agreement, these men had to be handed over. As ordered, Legrand made new arrangements for another transport to the Soviet zone.

It wasn't until 11 August that the prisoners were informed that they would have to go back after all. This delay presented a problem. By now many of the American soldiers had come to know and like the prisoners. That night, about half of the prisoners escaped

from the camp while the American guards quite happily looked the other way. Unfortunately, others remained, determined to resist.

On the morning of 12 August, several hundred of the prisoners went to the camp church. When the service had almost ended the senior Soviet prisoner in camp, General Danilov, entered the church with an American officer. The General began reading out the names of the 410 "condemned men" who would have to go back. He told these men to leave the church and get into the trucks which were waiting outside. Danilov advised them not to do anything which would induce the American guards to resort to violence. Priests who were at the scene, later described what happened next:

> Hardly had he finished the last name when the whole church burst into indescribable sobbing and weeping. Everyone was crying, old and young, men and women, and especially the children as they gazed up at their defenceless and inconsolable parents. The American officer immediately withdrew, ordering the guards to remain outside the church and await further instructions, and went to Major Legrand's office to report. After telephoning and receiving instructions, Legrand ordered the guards to dismiss. This they did, according to Cossack witnesses, with great delight, for they had spent three months with their charges and did not want to use violence against them.[140]

The church remained unguarded for approximately thirty minutes. Anyone could have easily escaped. However all stayed, believing the danger had past. Approximately thirty minutes later they learned how wrong they had been. A dozen trucks arrived carrying a large number of military police. The officer in charge of this new group, Colonel Lambert, immediately demanded that the prisoners board the trucks. When they

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[140] *The Last Secret*, p. 172

failed to comply, he ordered the MPs to drag them out. One of the priests at the scene later described the melee that ensued:

> The soldiers dragged us by our arms and legs, pulled us by the hair and beards. Fists and rifle butts were freely used. Shots were fired. Those who fell to the ground were beaten and kicked. The church was filled with wailing and cries of despair.[141]

Once the prisoners were outside, a number of them tried to escape over the wall which divided their camp from a camp housing DPs from the Baltic countries, however the MPs rushed in and beat them off the walls with their rifle. Eye witnesses stated that twelve prisoners were wounded, two seriously. In the end, approximately ninety prisoners were transferred to the Kempten railway station. There they joined another group of Soviet citizens who had been grabbed from other camps nearby. The train remained in the station overnight. A guard was mounted consisting of men from the camp. A Soviet prisoner later explained that "from the very beginning [the guards] closed their eyes to those Cossacks who, after nightfall, began to creep away one by one." The train left the next morning with only about fifty prisoners on board, some of whom later managed to escape "thanks to the mercy of the American guards".[142]

The Kempten operation convinced senior American officers in Europe that their soldiers were no longer willing to carry out their orders. The operation had inspired widespread revulsion among American soldiers. The troops had sent a clear message with the return of less than fifty of the original 410 inmates. On 25 August the United States Seventh Army requested further instructions from Headquarters about forcible

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[141] Ibid., p. 173
[142] Ibid., p. 174

repatriation. The matter was considered urgent enough to be referred to Washington and in the meantime soldiers in the field were ordered to stop sending people back.[143]

D. EISENHOWER CALLS A HALT

By the end of August, the English press had taken up the problem of forced repatriation. The *Manchester Guardian* printed several articles on the matter. Its lead article for 31 August 1945 made one of the first guarded references to the still-secret Yalta Agreement, expressing concern: "Here surely is a case where the Labour Government would be justified in asking for some revision. Unless these wretches are accused of some definite crime against the Soviets they should be given the same free choice as other displaced persons." [144]

On 4 September 1945, Eisenhower ordered a ban on the use of force. Although, he had originally been a proponent of repatriation, Eisenhower was appalled by the consequences of the policy. Like Alexander, he decided it was time for his government to acknowledge the tremendous problems caused by forcible repatriation and revise the policy to exclude the use of force. He sent a message to the Joint Chiefs of Staff requesting that the policy be examined in its entirety and that he be instructed whether or not United States troops would be used to forcibly collect and repatriate Soviet citizens. Eisenhower's decision received strong support from Field-Marshal Montgomery in the British zone, and his own Generals Clay, Bedell Smith, Patch and numerous other

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[143] Ibid., p. 175
[144] *Manchester Guardian*, 31 August 1945

commanders. The military hoped that this review would compel Washington to put an end to forced repatriation once and for all.

On 7 September, the JCS ordered the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC) to study and report on the policy, and make recommendations for any necessary changes. This was Washington's signal to the public and the military that they had the situation in hand and something would be done.

Although the policy was temporarily halted, the DPs refused to believe that the danger had passed, even if only temporarily. This disbelief led to another incident. On 6 September, U.S. authorities attempted to move 600 Ukranians and 96 Armenian men, women, and children from Mannheim to a Stuttgart DP center. Rumors soon spread that the real destination was the Soviet Union. Consequently, a riot ensued. A War Department investigation revealed that the man responsible for inciting the riot refused to obey orders and was "subdued forcibly" by the American soldiers. The crowd surged at the soldiers and a shot was fired to move them back. Accounts differ on whether the resistance leader was killed (émigré accounts) or injured (official account). Regardless, the DPs were not moved on that day. News of this incident, combined with media accounts of past repatriation operations, prompted Congresswoman Clare Booth Luce to query the War and State Departments about "the apparent conflict which exists between unpublished paragraphs of the Yalta Agreement and our common understanding here of the kind of freedom for which our soldiers fought."[145]

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[145] *Pawns of Yalta,* p. 92

E. THE MCNARNEY-CLARK DIRECTIVE

On 21 December, the SWNCC finally promulgated a declaration of policy. This revised policy tried to be all things to all people. In announcing this new policy the SWNCC declared that, "The United States has long had a firm policy against repatriation of unwilling individuals merely on demand of their country."[146] The new policy would still require forced repatriation, but against a more limited classification of people. Those who were to be returned "without regard to their wishes and by force if necessary" were "persons who were both citizens of and actually within the Soviet Union on 1 September 1939" and who fell into the following categories:

> a. Those captured in German uniforms.
>
> b. Those who were members of the Soviet armed forces on or after 22 June 1941, and who were not subsequently discharged therefrom.
>
> c. Those who were charged by the Soviet Union with having voluntarily rendered aid and comfort to the enemy . . . provided reasonable proof of such aid was proffered by Soviet authorities.[147]

Americans considered this a just policy. The public was still operating under the misconception that Soviet society was comparable to American society. They believed that those who had to be forced back must have been traitors or deserters.

In December, the *New York Herald Tribune* printed an article under the alarming headline - "Renegade Reds Roam Balkans, Spread Terror". The story explained that remnants of Vlasov's army were wandering around Austria "fully armed and desperate." It reported that these thousands of people moved about in wagon trains and did not

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[146] *The Last Secret,* p. 188
[147] *Foreign Relations of the United States - 1945, Vol. V,* p. 1106

hesitate to "murder farmers from whom they steal food." Such behavior proved the danger posed by Soviet traitors who managed to escape justice.

This portrayal of Soviet traitors was the image Washington needed conveyed to the public. How could Americans possibly have sympathy for Soviet traitors and deserters who went around killing innocent people? Better yet, what if the Soviets posed a danger to American soldiers? Upon receiving word that Eisenhower had called a halt to the repatriation operations, an American spokesman hinted to the press that one of the reasons behind Eisenhower's decision had been that some of the Soviet prisoners might have hidden arms. The spokesman explained that Washington was not "eager to risk the lives of American soldiers trying to make them go."[148] And so, the policy had been halted. Now, under the revised policy, the United States would bravely take on the mission of returning the Soviet miscreants endangering the security of a battered Europe. In addition, the U.S. would protect the rights of asylum of Soviet civilians choosing to begin a new life outside of the Soviet Union. Congressman Luce and the American people were convinced that justice was being served.

While the American public was satisfied with the revision, it pleased neither the Soviets, nor the British. Both governments continued to insist on repatriation of <u>all</u> citizens. The Americans hoped that the unpublished portion of the Directive would appease the Soviets and the British on that point. It stated that "every effort should be made to facilitate repatriation of persons who were both citizens of and actually within the

[148] *New York Times,* 5 October 1945

Soviet Union on 1 September 1939" but who did not fall into the categories eligible for forcible repatriation. To facilitate that effort it directed that:

> a. Soviet authorities be given "free access" upon request to the non-eligibles "for the purpose of persuading them to return voluntarily and assisting them to do so.
>
> b. To take steps to "minimize the development of organized resistance to repatriation, such as separating existing groups into smaller groups, segregating known leaders of any resistance groups . . ." and other measures as deemed appropriate.
>
> c. To continue "vigorous efforts to prevent the dissemination of propaganda of any kind designed to influence these persons against repatriation."[149]

This was not enough for either the Soviets or the British, however. The British argued that the new policy constituted a clear breach of the Agreement, which called for the return of "all Soviet citizens". The Soviet objections mirrored those of the Foreign Office. The U.S. refused to back down and the revision stood as it was.

Washington hoped that the U.S. military would be satisfied that it was no longer required to return women and children. This would be small compensation to the soldiers. The operations carried out under the SWNCC Directive resulted in scenes of bloodshed far more ghastly than at Kempten. The men liable for return under the new directive understandably put up the fiercest resistance, as they had the worst to fear in implementation of this new policy would bring is not clear. Evidently they did not terms of retribution. Whether the Joint Chiefs of Staff anticipated the problems the anticipate continued resistance from the military. According to SWNCC documents, "on 20 December 1945, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *perceiving no objections from a military point*

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[149] *Operation Keelhaul File 383.7-14.1*- AGWAR msg W93951

of view, to the recommendations contained in the report, informed the Committee that the Directive had been issued to the Commanding General, U.S. Forces, European Theater and the Commander in Chief, U.S. Forces of Occupation in Austria." [150] (italics added) The document was thereafter referred to as the McNarney-Clark directive, after Generals Joseph T. McNarney and Mark W. Clark who received it.

F. FINAL OPERATIONS

Ironically, the first repatriation operation under the terms of the McNarney-Clark Directive took place at Dachau, the site of one of Nazi Germany's most terrifying concentrations camps. Early in January, Soviet officers came into the camp and addressed the inmates, all of whom had been captured in German uniform. They informed the prisoners that "The Motherland has forgiven your crimes." None of the prisoners believed this lie and no one volunteered to go back. On 17 January, the prisoners were called out of their barracks and told to collect their possessions and prepare for transport to Soviet territory. They all refused. The Americans then ordered them at gunpoint. The prisoners, like so many before, begged to be shot on the spot. After several hours of being made to stand in the cold, the prisoners were dismissed. Some of them held out the hope that their stubbornness had paid off. For the preceding five months American soldiers had told them, no doubt in good faith, that forced repatriation would no longer be carried out.

Military authorities realized that the only way to carry out a successful operation, with a minimum of violence, was to employ a massive show of force. On 19 January a

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[150] *Foreign Relations of the United States - 1945, Vol. V*, p. 1108

shock force of 500 American and Polish military police arrived outside the camp. They surrounded the barracks and ordered the 399 inmates to come out. There was no movement. The MPs threw tear gas in through the windows, stormed in, and dragged the prisoners out. Many of the prisoners had stripped, believing that the guards would not take them into the open without their clothes. They were wrong. The MPs carried them outside and loaded them into the trucks.

The inmates had barricaded the door of one of the rooms. When the MPs finally broke in they faced a scene of "indescribable horror". One soldier reported that the prisoners "had fought like beasts to destroy themselves." Bethell summarized the eye-witness accounts: "Others stood side by side, slashing with pieces of glass at each other's throats. . . . Another struck his head straight through a pane of glass, then shook it from side to side pressing his neck down against the jagged edges. American and Russian witnesses agree that the whole room was flowing with blood."[151] One of the guards told a reporter: "It just wasn't human. There were no men in that barracks when we reached it. They were animals. The GIs quickly cut down most of those who had hanged themselves from the rafter. Those still conscious were screaming in Russian, pointing first at the guns of the guards, then at themselves, begging us to shoot."[152] [LS/190] The wounded men fought frantically to prevent the Americans from patching their wounds. The guards were forced to beat them with their sticks until they were unconscious so that they could sew them up. Those who gained consciousness while being carried to the trucks on stretchers jumped up and ran, opening their wounds.

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[151] *The Last Secret*, p. 190
[152] Ibid., p. 190

The American press reported ten suicides, with twenty-one seriously injured. It is very possible that more died on the journey to Soviet territory. One of the injured died later in an American hospital. The *New York Times* announced his death with a small article title, "Russian Traitor Dies of Wounds."

The after-action report on the incident, written by an officer on the scene, ended with the following remarks: "The incident was shocking. There is considerable dissatisfaction on the part of the American officers and men that they are being required by the American Government to repatriate these Russians . . . ."[153] Robert Murphy, the U.S. Political Advisor in Germany, was incensed when he received the report. He attached an indignant covering note and forwarded the report to the Secretary of State.

Murphy's protest was ignored. Opposition to the policy of forced repatriation had worn thin with Washington. The McNarney-Clark directive was the only concession Washington was willing to offer. As far as the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the State Department were concerned, the military would just have to find ways to carry out the operations in such a way to avoid incidents like Dachau.

The press reports of Dachau aroused protests from Pope Pius XII. He issued a strong condemnation of the (still) secret Yalta agreement, protesting against the "repatriation of men against their will and the refusal of right of asylum." The press reports stated that the Vatican's objections focused on the "secret clauses" of the Yalta Agreement, under which "such nationals, whether Ukrainians, Ruthenians or Poles, were to be considered as Soviet citizens and as deserters from the Red Army." However,

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[153] *The Secret Betrayal,* p. 355

because the U.S. had recently stopped the repatriation of civilians, a State Department representative was able to truthfully claim that no civilians were being forced back to Ruthenia or the Ukraine.[154]

The U.S. actually took advantage of the publicity on repatriation. A U.S. State Department representative reported to the press that the U.S. had "stood firm" against Soviet demands for the return of all Soviet citizens. He pointed out that the U.S. "did not recognize the Balts, eastern Poles or Ukrainians as necessarily Russian citizens at the time," and that Washington felt that sending back those people would have created a "serious precedent" which would have endangered foreign nationals fighting in the United States Army. He added that it had been the U.S. intention all along to abide by the Geneva Convention. Thus, the U.S. withstood the criticism unscathed.

1. Plattling

The next group of Soviets to be repatriated was a group of 3,000 of Vlasov's troops. These were the men who had managed to escape to the American zone soon after Germany's surrender. They had been held in a camp at Landau where security was virtually non-existent. In September 1945 they were transferred to a wired and guarded camp a few miles east of Plattling. The entire operation was classified Top Secret. Screening of these men was to be carried out by three separate boards, each consisting of three colonels. All but the members of the screening boards, and the interpreters assigned to them, knew the real reason for the screenings.

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[154] *New York Times,* 2 March 1946

While the screenings were being conducted, the American First Division was in training for the operation. Although the past few repatriation operations had used large groups of specially trained MPs, large numbers of guards had not been enough to avoid total chaos. The military believed that the element of surprise was necessary to prevent resistance and bloodshed. A predawn attack was planned. The military was so sure that this new approach would be successful that it had it filmed for use as a training device for future operations.

At 0545 on the morning of 24 February a column of American tanks approached the camp. A large body of guards carrying long riot clubs entered the prisoners' dormitory huts. The Soviets awoke to the shriek of a whistle and the guards cries of "Mak snell! Mak snell!" [Mach' schnell!]. In this manner, the prisoners were quickly driven from their huts. Years later an ex-prisoner described the scene:

> Many of us were barefoot and clad only in our underwear, though some had managed to snatch up a blanket. Any dawdler received a rain of blows from the soldiers' sticks. Many of us had to stand in six degrees of frost from 6 am until four o'clock that evening. We were in small groups surrounded by guards, two for every prisoner. They began shouting people's names out from lists and dividing us into two groups. Each of the groups was told, "Don't worry, you're only going to be moved to another part of the camp. It's the other group that's being sent to the Soviet Union.[155]

When the prisoners arrived at the railway station and saw the bars on the windows of the carriage cars, they realized they were being shipped back to Soviet Union. At that point many of the men attempted to commit suicide. Five succeeded. Two men somehow

[155] *The Last Secret,* p. 193

managed to wound themselves in the camp, but not fatally. They were shipped off anyway. In all, 1,590 prisoners were handed over that day.

The Americans returned to Plattling visibly shamefaced. Returning from the rendezvous point in the Bavarian forest, many had seen rows of bodies already hanging from the branches of nearby trees. According to Tolstoy, on the return to camp "SS men in a neighboring compound lined the wire fence and railed a them for their behaviour. The Americans were too ashamed to reply."[156]

2. Operation Keelhaul

All repatriation operations conducted in 1946 had, up to this point, been executed solely by the Americans. The British were still at a standstill. Because the majority of the Soviets under their control were in Italy, an area under joint command, they could not repatriate their prisoners without U.S. approval. As discussed earlier, the U.S. would not approve the British request to forcibly repatriate civilians. Eventually the Foreign Office came to realize the State Department was not going to reconsider its policy. On 6 June, the British saw no other option than to adopt the McNarney-Clark Directive. The War Office welcomed the decision, believing that "it means that soldiers will not be required to use force against people with whose reluctance to return to the USSR they may well sympathise."[157] Again, the military would be sorely disappointed.

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[156] *The Secret Betrayal,* p. 357
[157] Ibid., p. 360

There were approximately 1,000 people in camps in Italy who required screening. Most of these were Soviet citizens, some were Yugoslav Croats, and all of them were suspected of having fought with the Germans. Between 11 and 14 August these men were loaded into camps at Aversa and Bagnoli, near Naples. For several months the prisoners were kept at these bases while undergoing screening. Upon completion of screening the plan was to move the prisoners to two camps; one near Pisa (under American control), another near Riccione (under British control). The name given to the operation to transport these men to Pisa and Riccione was labelled "Operation Keelhaul." The follow-on operation, to hand them over to the Soviets, was labeled "Operation Eastwind."

On 14 August 1946 "Operation Keelhaul" swung into action. The U.S. and British took elaborate precautions against suicide. Escorting troops carried supplies of small-arms, handcuffs, and tear-gas grenades. The trips went off without incident. The Soviets arrived in the camps at Pisa and Riccione the following day: 498 at Riccione and 432 at Pisa.

Operation Keelhaul would last for nine months. During this time, prisoners were screened in excruciating detail. It was not unusual for an inmate to be screened three to four times. It is obvious from the Keelhaul documents that the officers conducting the screenings gave the Soviets the benefit of the doubt in questionable cases. This seems especially true of the American screeners, as evidenced by the final numbers of prisoners repatriated from each of the Allied camps. Of the 498 inmates taken into the camp at

Riccione under British control, 180 were returned.[158] Only 76 of the 509[159] from the camp at Pisa, under American control, were repatriated.

Denis Hills, a British Officer fluent in Russian, was responsible for carrying out the screenings in the camp at Riccione. Hills had been involved in repatriation operations from the beginning and held no illusions about the fate awaiting the repatriates. He was, therefore, determined to let go as many people as possible.

When Hills first started his screenings, he sent "test" cases to GHQ, to get a feel for what his headquarters would accept as an exemption, and what they would refuse. Hills explained that GHQ accepted all of his recommendations for reprieve, but that he inherently understood that a representative body of Soviets must go back. Years later Hills explained to some of the survivors, "when the Soviet Union demands 400 men, I cannot send them twenty."[160] Hills explained that his criteria for categorizing someone as repatriatable or not had as much to do with his opinion of an individual's capacity to survive in the slave labor camps as on anything else.

The U.S.'s approach to the interrogations was much different. The prisoners in the American-controlled camp were subjected to five screening boards. For various reasons military authorities were dissatisfied with the results of the first four screenings and finally held a Board comprised of three senior officers. The final screening was completed in February.

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[158] That may be an unfair assumption. The majority of the inmates in the American camp were Turks, whereas those in the British camp were mostly Soviet. This could account for the difference in the numbers of persons repatriated.

[159] The number differs from the previous paragraph due to the fact that 11 prisoners were brought in at a later time.

[160] *The Secret Betrayal,* p. 362-363

The leeway the officers enjoyed as members of a Screening Board is obvious in the results of this fifth Board. In at least thirteen cases, the Board changed a prisoner's status from "doubtful" to "not subject to repatriation." In three of the cases it changed a prisoner's status from "subject to repatriation" to "not subject to repatriation.". A post-screening report, signed by all the members of the board, stated that, "It is probable that many of the individuals listed in "Operation Keelhaul" are Red Army deserters or war criminals, but proof thereof is lacking."[161] It is obvious that the Board members refused to mark anyone for repatriation without irrefutable evidence that the person met the provisions of the McNarney-Clark Directive.

3. Operation Eastwind

Once the screenings were completed Operation Eastwind was put into action. The Allies took extreme pains to see that the handover of personnel would be free of incidents. On 19 April, U.S. Army Headquarters at Leghorn issued a directive detailing requirements and guidelines for the Eastwind operation. This directive included the following guidance on security measures:

> (1) Use of handcuffs, straightjackets, clubs, and tear gas to the extent necessary to accomplish the mission of returning the repatriates to Russian custody is authorized.
>
> (2) Use of firearms to prevent escape, armed assault, or insurrection which goes beyond restraint. . . .
> (5) Every effort will be made to return repatriates alive, but when no other means will prevent their escape, shooting becomes necessary, or if death occurs through natural causes, bodies will be delivered to the Russian authorities at destination.

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[161] *Operation Keelhaul File 383.7-14.1,* Screening Board Proceedings Report (undated)

The Plattling operations had been useful training for the Americans and provided invaluable guidance to the British. Massive amounts of force, combined with surprise, ensured that operations from both camps went off without incident. A Riccione Operation Eastwind after-action report offers a damning explanation of the reasons behind the success of the mission. The tone of this report demonstrates the disdain the troops felt for the operations.

> Prior to Operation Eastwind the Soviet citizens held in this enclave had always threatened to resist to the utmost of their powers any attempts to repatriate them. Almost every Russian among them has stated to me on one occasion or another, "If ever you try to repatriate me, it will be my dead body only that you will get."
>
> The fact that in the final event no resistance was offered and the arrangement for removing the Russians went off so smoothly is primarily due to the circumstances that after having remained unmolested in British hands for two years, they had allowed themselves to be lulled into a false sense of security and they were therefore taken completely by surprise. The Russians had such blind faith in the British NOT throwing them to the wolves that they did not realise they were being repatriated until IT WAS TOO LATE TO RESIST. [162]

As at Plattling, the Soviets were called out of their barracks before dawn. A column of trucks drove up suddenly. A large body of British soldiers jumped out and began hustling the prisoners to the trucks. There was no chance for the men to escape as they were enclosed on either side by a double rank of troops armed with machine guns. Two jeeps, equipped with machine guns, and armed motorcyclists served as the convoy's escorts. The railway station was even more heavily guarded and had been entirely

[162] Julius Epstein's *Operation Keelhaul* holdings, Hoover Institute - Report by 218 Sub Area, Riccione, 15 May 47

enclosed by barbed wire. A thorough search of the prisoners had taken place at the camp, and a second search was conducted before the men were entrained.

As the searches were being conducted in the train station, the camp leader, Major Pavel Ivanov, asked permission to speak to Denis Hills. Ivanov had exercised great influence over the prisoners. According to the after action report, "He did everything in his power to dissuade Russians from escaping and he frequently informed me of persons who he believed were planning to escape. . . . Major Ivanov's tactics were based on the belief that if the Russians in his charge behaved themselves in an exemplary manner and made a good impression on their custodians, they would eventually stand a better chance of being accepted as permanent emigrants with proven qualities of good citizenship." Ivanov walked over to Hills and murmured: "So you are sending us to our death after all. I believed in you. Democracy has let us down."[163]

The journey from Riccione to the Soviet zone of Austria took twenty-four hours. The searches had not been as thorough as originally thought; some men produced knives and began cutting their wrists. One cut his throat. Others begged to be shot. However, the prisoners were vastly outnumbered by British troops who quickly and violently subdued their prisoners. The Soviets spent the remainder of train ride tearing up letters and family photographs. All hope had vanished.

While the majority of the Soviets were traveling to their deaths, twelve men were back at Riccione trying to decide the fate of their wives and children. Before the British had descended upon the camp, British authorities had segregated the twelve families and

[163] Ibid.

informed them that the men would be handed over to the Soviets. They were given 24 hours in which to decide whether the males would travel alone or with their wives and children. Naturally all of the husbands refused to allow their families to accompany them. Very painful scenes of agony ensued over the final 24 hours the families had together. More unbearable scenes of parting were witnessed the next morning. The after-action report reads:

> It is impossible to exaggerate the painfulness of this aspect of Operation Eastwind. Breaking the news to those families that they were to be repatriated seemed equivalent to delivering a death sentence. The circumstances were made more macabre by the fact that wife and children were invited to share the fate of their men-folk if they wished. In retrospect, it is thought that it would have been more humane to have seized the men-folk for repatriation without offering them the choice of taking their dependents with them if they wished; for in the final event, the results were exactly the same.[164]

The following day another train left Riccione with nine of the married men accompanied by forty British soldiers. Three of the twelve had been excluded by Denis Hills on the grounds of sickness and other pretexts. Up to the very last, he felt compelled to do what he could to save as many as he could.

There are no detailed accounts of the American portion of the Eastwind Operation. No doubt it was almost identical to the British operation. The AFHQ message to the Combined Chiefs of Staff and the Ministry of Defence simply stated:

> On 10 May 47 under United States Control 76 male repatriates were turned over to USSR representatives at San Valentino, Austria without incident. No dependents opted to accompany repatriates. Train released and returned to Italy promptly.[165]

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[164] Ibid.

[165] *Operation Keelhaul File 383.7-14.1,* AFHQ SIGMED SACMED msg May 201736

After the completion of Operation Eastwind, Italian authorities turned over ten Soviet Georgians to AFHQ. They had been labeled as "military collaborators," thus subject to forced repatriation. One escaped, two were deemed too sick to travel, and a fourth was declared "demented." On 6 June 1947, AFHQ shipped the remaining six out of Rimini bound for turnover to the Soviets. On 8 June 1947, Soviet officials took custody of these men. This was the last documented instance of Allied forced repatriation under the post-World War II Repatriation Agreement.

The British Officer who wrote the Eastwind after-action report spoke for all Allied soldiers when he wrote, "No amount of arguing will erase the feeling of humiliation in having had to participate in an operation of this sort." Almost forty years after the war, an American soldier who took part in the repatriation operations asked the question, "Who is going to have to answer for all this suffering?" Most likely no one will ever have to answer for it. The real danger is that we forget it.

PART II

ANALYSIS OF OBEDIENCE AND DISOBEDIENCE

VII. ANALYSIS

> *. . . there are ways of responding to an order short of obeying it: postponement, evasion, deliberate misunderstanding, loose construction, overly literal construction, and so on . . . . Whenever these possibilities are open, moral men will seize upon them.*
>
> *Michael Walzer*
> *from Just and Unjust Wars*

When the U.S. Government agreed to repatriate "all Soviet citizens," neither the military nor the diplomats foresaw that thousands would put up such fierce resistance. Horrendous scenes of violence involving women and children sparked grass roots opposition which spread throughout the rank and file. Eventually military leaders called a halt to the operations, forcing the government to revise the policy. Although the revision eliminated the element of the policy the military found most repugnant (the forcible return of civilians), repatriation operations continued. In fact, some of the most violent scenes of resistance occurred during operations carried out under the revised policy. Yet military leaders did not call a second halt to repatriation operations. Instead, they ordered that extraordinary precautionary measures be taken to avoid additional scenes of carnage. What had the revision changed that caused the military to feel that it now had no choice but to comply?

Before exploring the answer to that question, it is necessary to address the questions posed in the introduction. What causes a soldier to choose to disobey an order? How does the military react when faced with an order with which it does not agree? Are full compliance or total disobedience considered the only alternatives?

A. ALTERNATIVES TO OBEDIENCE

The answer to the last of these questions is self-evident. A review of the operations clearly shows not only was total disobedience not considered the only alternative to obedience: for the vast majority it was considered the last resort. Although a handful of soldiers and officers refused to carry out the order to repatriate people against their will, the majority of military personnel chose instead to avoid the sickening duty. Adopting a lax security posture was the most widely-used method chosen for that purpose. Reporting to sick call to evade duty was another.

B. THE CASE FOR OBEDIENCE

If opposition to the policy of forced repatriation was so wide-spread, as military actions proved it to be, why did military personnel not collectively refuse to carry out the order? If Eisenhower had halted the policy and forced Washington to revise the policy, why didn't he feel he could continue the pressure and refuse to carry out any forced repatriation operations until the government had no choice but to discontinue the use of force altogether?

The answer lies in the soldier's concept of the military profession. In an essay entitled, "The Military Mind," Samuel Huntington explains:

> The military profession exists to serve the state. To render the highest possible service the entire profession and the military force which it leads must be constituted as an effective instrument of state policy. Since political direction comes only from the top, this means that the profession has to be organized into a hierarchy of obedience. For the profession to perform its function, each level within it must be able to command the instantaneous and loyal

> obedience of subordinate levels. Without these relationships military professionalism is impossible. Consequently, loyalty and obedience are the highest military virtues: the rule of obedience is simply the expression of that one among the military virtues upon which all the others depend. When the military man receives a legal order from an authorized superior, he does not argue, he does not hesitate, he does not substitute his own views; he obeys instantly. He is judged not by the policies he implements, but rather by the promptness and efficacy with which he carries them out. His goal is to perfect an instrument of obedience; the uses to which that instrument is put are beyond his responsibility.[166]

The statements and actions of the of those involved in the repatriation operations reflect that Huntington's assessment is accurate. General Keightley stated that his orders to repatriate the Cossacks came directly from Churchill, and therefore what he thought about the matter did not affect the issue. Brigade Commander General Musson agreed with this view. He explained:

> I can't envisage a case where an officer would ever disobey an order. A soldier is an agent of the government policy. He can't judge the rights and wrongs. He doesn't have enough information. He can represent his views, and we did this, we made it perfectly clear how ghastly the job was. But the ultimate decision must lie with the political leaders. I don't see how you can run an army or anything else if your soldiers refuse to carry out orders.[167]

The military indoctrinates its personnel to believe that subordinating one's own will and judgment to the will and judgment of one's government is a functional necessity. The acceptance of this believe is what makes the path of disobedience such a difficult one to choose. In his book Just and Unjust Wars, Michael Walzer points out that:

> even when a soldier's doubts and anxieties are widely shared, they are still the subject of private brooding, not of public discussion. And when he acts, he acts alone, with no assurance that his comrades

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[166] Huntington, Samuel P., "The Military Mind: Conservative Realism of the Professional Military Ethic" In *War, Morality, and the Military Profession,* edited by Malham Wakin, pp. 47-48

[167] *The Last Secret,* p. 206

> will support him. Civil protest and disobedience usually arise out of a community of values. But the army is an organization, not by their private commitment. Theirs is the rough solidarity of men who face a common enemy and endure a common discipline. On both sides of a war, unity is reflexive, not intentional or premeditated. To disobey is to breach that elemental accord, to claim moral separateness (or a moral superiority), to challenge one's fellows, perhaps even to intensify the dangers they face. "This is what is most difficult," wrote a French soldier who went to Algeria and then refused to fight, "being cut off from the fraternity, being locked up in a monologue, being incomprehensible."[168]

There is another, more practical reason Allied troops did not simply refuse to carry out their orders. They were not certain that what they were ordered to do was "legally" wrong. The fact that they considered forcible repatriation morally wrong was not enough justification for them to refuse to obey. In war the military is called upon to carry out acts that in peacetime would be considered criminal (i.e, killing, bombing, etc.). The very nature of the military profession sometimes makes it difficult (but not impossible) to distinguish between a lawful and unlawful act. In some cases the distinction is obvious, but not always.

During the course of my research I queried many military personnel of various Services as to what, in their minds, constituted an illegal order. Most cited the order LT Calley gave to his troops at My Lai. To the person, they stated that what made this order unlawful was that it called for the killing of "innocent civilians." It seems simple enough. Killing innocent civilians is unlawful, therefore an order to do so should be refused. Yet in war the situation is not always so clear. The definition of "innocent" (not in hindsight, but in the heat of the moment) becomes relative.

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[168] Walzer, Michael. *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations.* USA: Basicbooks, 1977, pp. 316-317

Those involved in the My Lai incident know all too well the twisted thinking that is often a product of war. LT Calley argued that the inhabitants of My Lai had to be considered as enemy spies for the safety of the American troops. In the case of the repatriation operations, officials labelled those to be repatriated as "traitors" - they had betrayed their country and joined forces with the most despicable dictator imaginable. Sending them back to their country was the just punishment they deserved. This was not only the word coming down from Washington and top military officials, it was public perception. The idea of going against such a powerful majority must have seemed a daunting prospect.

Reverend William Sloane Coffin was an Army Officer who served as the Chief U.S. Interpreter at Plattling. As such, he played an integral role in sorting out who was eligible and who exempt from repatriation. He states that when he first arrived at Plattling, he had "little sympathy for these Russians in their battered German uniforms. I couldn't see how any decent Russian could have volunteered to fight for so arch a villain as Hitler, who had invaded and pillaged their country, had incarcerated their compatriots in labor camps and put six million Jews to death in gas chambers."[169] However, Coffin soon came to know about the "cruelties of collectivization" as well as "the arrests, shootings, and wholesale deportations of families." He came to understand that these Russians (as they preferred to think of themselves) were driven by a desire to protect the country they loved without "strengthening the hand of the dictator they hated."

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[169] Coffin, William Sloane. *Once to Every Man a Memoir.* New York: Stratford Press, 1977, p. 73

Coffin befriended these men and came to sympathize with their plight. He explained, "Hearing . . . the personal histories of those who had joined Vlasov's army made me increasingly uncomfortable with the words 'traitor' and 'deserter,' as applied to these men." Years later, Coffin stated that he began to consider that "Maybe Stalin's regime was worthy of desertion and betrayal?" Coffin poses his consideration as a question because he was not entirely sure. Neither were the majority of British and American officers and soldiers ordered to carry out the job of forced repatriation. Although they despised their task, they were not willing to risk their reputations or careers, perhaps even their lives, based on their personal opinions of the situation.

And still, the reason the soldiers carried out these orders went beyond their uncertainty of the legality of the orders. It went beyond the instilled belief in the necessity of obedience. It goes back to General Musson's statement concerning the belief that a soldier is an agent of government policy. As such, it is not his place to judge the actions of the government, but to carry out the orders he is given, trusting that what he is asked to do is in the best interest of his country. It goes back to the military motto, "Duty, Honor, Country" - the idea that the soldier owes his allegiance to the greater aim.

Coffin explains this best. The night before the prisoners at Plattling were surprised by American troops and ushered into trucks bound for Soviet territory, Coffin had the opportunity to warn them what was going to happen. Ironically, that night the prisoners held a dinner in honor of the members of the Screening Board. The Board members could not stomach such an occasion in light of what was to take place and ordered Coffin to go

as their representative. Throughout the evening Coffin had the opportunity to warn the commandant, yet he could not bring himself to do it. He explains:

> Several times I turned to the commandant sitting next to me. It would have been so easy to tip him off. There was still time. The camp was minimally guarded. Once outside the men could tear up their identity cards, get other clothes. It was doubtful that the Americans would try hard to round them up. Yet I couldn't bring myself to do it. It was not that I was afraid of being court-martialed: the commandant probably wouldn't give me away. But I too had my orders. It was one thing to let individual deserters escape in the woods. It was something else again to blow a Top Secret operation ordered by Washington itself with the Soviet government ready to make a terrible row if it failed.[170]

C. LIMITS OF OBEDIENCE

Coffin's confession that he allowed prisoners escape into the woods leads to the idea of limits of obedience. As discussed, many factors played into the officers' and soldiers' reluctance to disobey orders, no matter how offensive the orders. However there were limits to that obedience.

While Coffin was serving as Russian Liaison Officer in Czechoslovakia, his unit was assigned to transport Red Army deserters captured in the American zone to Soviet-controlled territory. Coffin quickly discovered that the Red Army guards had an efficient method of handling these deserters. They took them to the side of the guard house and shot them. Upon witnessing this, Coffin insisted that from that point on, he alone would transport all deserters to the Soviet zone. He devised a means to let them escape by

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[170] Ibid., pp. 76-77

driving into the forest and slowing down until the prisoner understood he was to jump out. In Coffin's mind, letting selected prisoners escape did not jeopardize a military operation. It did not jeopardize U.S.-Soviet relations. It was his only means of protecting helpless men against persecution from the Red Army.

Coffin's reaction is typical of the vast majority of personnel involved in the repatriation operations. Although not prepared to compromise an entire operation, they found it their moral obligation to take measures to protect their prisoners from unjust retribution.

Douglas McArthur once wrote, "The soldier, be he friend or foe, is charged with the protection of the weak and unarmed. It is the very essence and reason of his being . . . [a] sacred trust." Yet what does a soldier do when he is ordered to violate that trust? As with the soldiers burdened with the unenviable task of forcible repatriation, he compromises. That is what the Allied officers and soldiers did. They found a way to balance their sense of justice with their military obligation. The soldiers were resigned to the fact that they could not change the policy. Instead they would have to be satisfied with doing what they could to save as many lives as possible.

1. Red Army Behavior

There were several factors that led Allied troops to believe that the political decision to repatriate the Soviets was flawed. One major factor was the behavior of the Red Army. As with Coffin's experience, Allied troops quickly learned that the idea of Soviet justice did not agree with their own. American and British soldiers and officers

were shocked and horrified at the behavior and attitude of the Soviet soldiers. Throughout the war, the Allies had been told that the Soviets held the same beliefs and ideals as the average British and American citizen. However, the Red Army soldiers quickly dispelled that myth. Due to the barbaric treatment Soviet soldiers meted out to their own citizens, Allied forces began to see themselves in the role of protectors of their Soviet prisoners and considered it their moral obligation to aid these unfortunate victims at every opportunity.

2. Geneva Convention

The initial reaction of the military leadership to the Soviets captured in German uniform was to treat them as German prisoners of war. As such they were entitled to the right of asylum. When the Allied Governments denied the Soviets that right, the military began to question the legality of the order. As the ex-sergeant in Patton's army stated, the troops felt strongly that, as prisoners of war, the Soviets should have been returned only if they so wished. Because the Allied Governments had decided to ignore their legal obligation, the military felt compelled to right that wrong.

3. End-of-War Mentality

One of the more basic reasons for the soldiers' resistance to the policy was that, by the end of June 1945, Europe had been at peace for nearly two months. The Allied forces had had enough of war and were becoming less and less hardened to violence. And the

longer the troops spent with the prisoners, the more they learned about how the Soviets came to fight or work for the Reich. At first the Allied soldiers did not believe the fantastic stories they heard of torture and persecution. However, the behavior of the Red Army soldiers, the fierce resistance of the prisoners, and the physical evidence shown to them by camp inmates convinced them that the press version of the Soviet Union was appallingly misleading.

The troops passed on their new-found knowledge of the harsh realities of the Soviet system and the fate awaiting the repatriates to their superiors and protested the policy. However, their entreaties were ignored. Again, this contributed to the military's belief that they had to provide the protection their own governments were obligated, but refused, to provide.

4. Violence against women and children

The most offensive aspect of the repatriation operations to the soldiers and officers, was the violence they were ordered to carry out against women and children. Such behavior violated the soldiers' sentiments of humanity. Once they were forced to engage in acts of violence against women and children they lost respect for their superiors who failed to stop it, and they lost heart for any further operations. As one British officer remarked, "I went into the thing in complete innocence and came out disgusted."[171]

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[171] *The Last Secret*, p. 101

5. Issues of Morality

The military's belief that its orders should not be carried out to the letter were predicated on the idea that the policy was immoral. The Allies' refusal to offer Soviets the right of asylum, the Soviet authorities' maltreatment of their citizens, and the violence perpetrated against civilians during the repatriation operations were wrongs that the military felt an obligation to right at least to the degree that would allow them to balance their military and moral obligation.

D. METHODS OF DISOBEDIENCE

Michael Walzer writes that "there are ways of responding to an order short of obeying it: postponement, evasion, deliberate misunderstanding, loose construction, overly literal construction, and so on. . . . Whenever these possibilities are open, moral men will seize upon them."[172] And so it was with the men faced with the ugly prospect of forcing people back to the Soviet Union.

1. The "Loose Field Policy"

The "loose field policy" was the method most commonly employed by the military to avoid carrying out forced repatriation. This policy was basically an understanding among the rank and file that any and all methods of allowing the prisoners to evade repatriation would not be punished and, in many cases, was encouraged. It is difficult to

[172] *Just and Unjust Wars*, p. 314

say how this was communicated to the troops. While some commanders may have stated the policy overtly, they would have been in the minority. What more commonly occurred was that commanders would imply that anyone caught assisting prisoners to escape would not be punished.

The military has a silent means of communication that is very difficult to describe. It is not something that is taught, but is instead an inherent understanding that develops from being part of the military community. Military personnel act on signals or cues from their superiors as often as they act on direct orders. It was largely through this silent means of communication that the "loose field policy" came into effect. An actual incident best illustrates how this was done.

An American ex-GI described how his unit came to protect their Russian (he was not a Soviet citizen) interpreter from repatriation at the end of the war. The interpreter was well-liked by all members of the unit. One day the Officer in Charge called the troops together. He announced that the Soviets had been asking questions about sending the interpreter over to Soviet control. He added that he would hate to see the interpreter go, and hoped it would never come to that, but he felt he should give the troops a "heads up" that it was a possibility. According to the GI, the message behind this announcement was clear. The Officer in Charge was telling his unit to do whatever was necessary to protect their "Russian" from repatriation. He did not tell them how. He did not need to. He knew the troops would do what troops do: innovate. From that point forward the unit ensured that it protected the interpreter by warning him of upcoming visits by battalion

personnel or "anyone whose loyalty we couldn't be sure of." With the troops' assistance, the Russian escaped repatriation.

This type of tacit approval of measures to thwart repatriation operations or bending the rules was rife throughout the military, and it was led by the officer community. As one ex-GI stated, the loose field policy "wouldn't have worked if the officers hadn't gone along with it. We took our cues from the officers." [173]

A lax security posture was the most common means used to allow prisoners to escape. Soldiers merely looked the other way as prisoners walked out of the camp. The incident at the camp at Cinecittà, described earlier, is a typical example of just how lax security became. The prisoners were not only allowed to escape once, but twice. Camp Kempten is another example of how blatant the lax security policy was - 360 of 410 prisoners escaped during the course of the operation.

Not only did the military look the other way, soldiers often actively assisted escape. Just as the officers made it clear to the troops that they would not be punished for allowing escapes, so the troops made it clear to the prisoners that they would allow them to escape. An interview with an ex-Army officer revealed that the troops would often run the repatriation trains at a snail's-pace in order to enable prisoners to jump off without injuring themselves. It did not take long for the prisoners to understand the soldiers' cues for any one of the various ploys used to facilitate escape.

Soldiers did not restrict themselves to silent signals. As time wore on, many began to warn the prisoners of what was to take place. Despite the fact that Operation Keelhaul

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[173] Ambassador Rodney Minott, interview.

was a top secret operation, word of what was to happen seems to have somehow reached the prisoners. A British report on the operation explains that a change to the number of prisoners listed in a previous report is due to a "substantial" number of escapes.

Deeming orders too confusing or contradictory was another way of avoiding having to carry them out. Officers claimed that they did not understand exactly who fell under the Agreement, and therefore, did not dare repatriate anyone until clarification of the policy was received.

2. The apparatus of delay

The "apparatus of delay," as Churchill called it, was widely used by military commanders who objected to forced repatriation. However, none made better use of it than Field Marshall Alexander. From June to December 1945 he managed to avoid carrying out the order to forcibly repatriate the prisoners under his control. He did this by requesting repeated clarification of orders. The act of requesting clarification, in and of itself was a delaying tactic. However, Alexander's requests for clarification specifically mentioned that the continuation of the policy would result in the deaths of many of the repatriates. Alexander's explicit warnings about the ramifications of the policy forced the British Government to acknowledge, in writing, that it was aware of the deaths resulting from the policy, yet wanted it continued regardless. Naturally, this caused debate among the members of the Foreign Office, thereby prolonging the delay.

Alexander requested this clarification for each group that came under his control. The receipt of a new request effectively renewed the debate in the Foreign Office thus

causing further delay. Alexander then put off the continued demands of the Soviet Government for the immediate return of the prisoners by stating he had not yet received permission to forcibly repatriate prisoners. Once he received an order to do so however, he would submit another request for review on a slightly different angle.

Alexander employed a series of methods of postponement. In addition to calling for repeated reviews of the policy, he used the bureaucracy of the joint command structure to his advantage. Under a joint command, approval to carry out orders had to come from both the U.S. and British governments. Alexander refused to carry out his orders without the approval of the U.S. Joint Command. He seized upon this tactic knowing full well that the U.S. had temporarily postponed all repatriation operations.

Alexander was not the only one to use this approach. Eisenhower brought the policy of forced repatriation to a halt from the early September to late December 1945 by employing the same method. This technique was widely used by military commanders. Requests for clarification flowed in from all levels. The tactics of delay were usually employed to buy time to allow the "loose field policy" to do its work.

In August 1945, General Alexander Patch, Commander of the U.S. Seventh Army, requested SHAEF to spell out American policy on the use of American troops to turn over unwilling repatriates to the Soviets. He informed SHAEF that he would suspend the use of force while awaiting its response.

General Joseph McNarney, Commanding General of the U.S. forces in Germany, requested a legal opinion as to whether Soviets who had been denied one of several inalienable rights (as defined by U.S. law), such as the right to bear arms, to vote in

elections, or to hold public office were considered to have been deprived of citizenship. He argued that if this were the determination, the prisoners were not subject to repatriation by force. The U.S. State Department and JCS declared his arguments "imaginable" but unacceptable. However he managed to delay the return of the Soviets for almost two months with this request.

3. Exploitation of Bureaucracy

As the protests against forcible repatriation grew more and more fierce, the red tape required to effect a repatriation operation grew. Multiple screening boards became an integral part of the repatriation process. Ostensibly these screening boards were designed to ensure that only those who fell under the Repatriation Agreement and, later, the McNarney-Clark Directive were returned to Soviet control. Without question, this was the primary purpose of the boards. However, they also served as an ideal tool to assist prisoners in evading repatriation.

Board members were given a relatively free hand to determine who was eligible for return and who was not. The determinations were based on matters such as proof of citizenship, past membership in the Red Army, or place of residence during specific periods of time. A prisoner could very easily claim, and often did, that his official papers had been lost or taken from him. In such cases, Board members had to rely on the prisoner's word. Some reports suggest that Soviet informers were placed inside the camp, with the blessing of Allied authorities, to weed out the truth on the prisoner's past. Even if that were the case, screening board documents from the Operation Keelhaul files

indicate that hearsay evidence on a person's past was generally disregarded. Only positive documentation was accepted to qualify a prisoner for repatriation.

The documentation provided by the prisoners was often fake. In The Secret Betrayal, Tolstoy relates an incident that occurred with Latvian soldiers under British control which offers some clues as to the availability of false documentation. Tolstoy states that the British held several units of Latvians who had fought with the Waffen SS. When the British Camp Commander learned that these men were all to be handed over to the Soviets he warned the Camp Commandant. Immediately upon hearing the news, the prisoners, with the assistance of their compatriots in DP camps, easily acquired civilian clothes and papers. With their new identities the prisoners were able to quickly melt into the DP camps or the town population.

This was not an isolated incident. Years after the operations, Major Davies admitted that he allowed many prisoners to register as non-Soviet citizens under false papers. Colonel Shadwell is reported to have registered large numbers of Ukrainians as Polish citizens. The bureaucratic monster built up around the operations became an extremely useful tool for the Allied military and their prisoners. With the aid of false documentation and the allowance of arbitrary rulings by Board members, Screening Boards cleared more personnel from repatriation than they condemned to it.

4. Innovative Methods

There were those officers who chose not to rely on any of the above tactics. Disgusted with both the policy and their government for implementing it, they showed

their distaste for the operations in a more blatant fashion. In June 1945, General Patton simply released the 5,000 prisoners under his control, thereby dispensing of the need for screening boards, requests for review, etc. Washington took no action against him. The Soviets were happy with the speed at which mass repatriations were going at the time and there is no record of the Soviet Government protesting the incident. Washington was probably content to let the episode pass without incident.

Colonel Charles Findlay of the Royal Artillery took a unique approach to the problem. He was the commandant of a camp in Italy whose population consisted of 800 Chechens, Ingushs, and other Soviet Moslems. Soon after VE day Findlay was ordered to transport the prisoners to Leghorn for shipment home by the Soviet Repatriation Commission. Findlay was not prepared to hand over these citizens, however, he felt compelled to follow orders. His solution was to follow both his orders and his conscience. He had all the prisoners loaded on the train. The train steamed to Leghorn and, without unloading any of its passengers, steamed back to Naples. The prisoners were then hastily placed on board a ship which carried them to Egypt where they were put under the protection of King Farouk.[174]

It is quite probable that other methods to impede repatriation efforts were employed by all members of the rank and file. However, until all government files on the operations are open, these stand as representative of the military's protest against forced repatriation. The result of this protest is an estimated 500,000 Soviets who were able to escape repatriation.

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[174] *The Secret Betrayal*, p. 307

E. REINSTITUTION OF THE POLICY

In light of the military's obvious dissatisfaction with the policy, why did Eisenhower agree to continue forced repatriation in December 1945? Military opinion had not changed. So what had?

Eisenhower called a halt to forced repatriation when he decided that the policy was not "lawful" and, perhaps more important to him, when the operations were becoming so violent that there was a danger of American troops being injured. What made this order "unlawful" in the eyes of Eisenhower was that the policy included *civilians.* Eisenhower considered it only right that Red Army deserters and Soviets captured in German Uniforms be sent back to face their punishment, but civilians were a different story. In his book, Crusade in Europe, he explains his view:

> A displaced person was defined as a civilian outside the national boundaries of his or her country by reason of war, ... But those we soon came to designate particularly as Displaced Persons, DPs for short, did not include these easily dispersible thousands. The truly unfortunate were those who, for one reason or another, no longer had homes or were "persecutees" who dared not return home for fear of further persecution. The terror felt by this last group was impressed on us by a number of suicides among individuals who preferred to die rather than return to their native lands. *In some instances these may have been traitors who rightly feared the punishment they knew to be in store for them.*[175] (italics added)

As far as Eisenhower was concerned the revision of the policy announced by the McNarney-Clark Directive eliminated the illegal aspect of the policy.

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[175] Eisenhower, Dwight D. *Crusade in Europe.* New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1948, p.439

The elimination of the requirement to repatriate civilians did not appease the military as a whole, but it did remove the most hated element of the policy. Eisenhower and Washington officials understood that the troops were still opposed to their orders and they were well aware that there was not much they could do to tighten up the loose field policy - so they closed their eyes to it.

F. GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO DISOBEDIENCE

The U.S. had hoped that the McNarney-Clark Directive would appease everyone: the Soviets, the British, as well as their own military commanders. However, the revision was seen as either too little or too much by all parties concerned. The Foreign Office and the Kremlin continued to push for repatriation of *all* Soviet citizens, whereas the U.S. military grumbled over the prospect of having to use force to repatriate anyone. Nonetheless Washington was determined that the revision would remain as it was. The State Department ignored the protests of the Foreign Office and the Kremlin and ordered the military to carry out the operations as quickly and quietly as possible.

State and Military officials were well aware that the military was using various methods to evade orders. As discussed earlier, they knew it was impossible to deal with the problem head-on for fear of calling attention to the policy. Instead, they focused on an approach designed to lessen the impact of the "loose field policy" and to stave off any resistance of their troops to carrying out their orders.

In order to prevent troops assigned to repatriation operations from balking at completing the job, authorities brought in units comprised largely of "green troops" -

soldiers fairly new to the military. In general, the newer a soldier is to the military, the more anxious he is to obey. Motivated partially by an eagerness to prove himself a loyal and obedient soldier and partially by fear of getting in trouble, he strives to complete all tasks quickly and correctly. Just as the soldier who was "tricked" into repatriation duty in Czechoslovakia, green troops are more fearful than seasoned troops that if they don't carry out orders to the letter it could mean their "hide".

Aside from just being "green", the military chose troops who had no exposure to the prisoners history, or the events that had taken place during prior repatriation operations. The comments of an ex-GI involved in guarding Soviet forced laborers is undoubtedly representative of the attitude authorities looked for in those they chose for the final operations: "From what I remember, we troops had little or no knowledge of relationships with the Soviets. We were all young GI's and our main thought was to get the damned war over with and return to our homes. We probably didn't give a damn about the Soviets and the political situation."[176]

Beginning with Plattling, the units assigned to carry out repatriation operations were trained to act as a quick-strike forces. One can guess that these men (mainly MPs) weren't given much more than the order to charge in and load the prisoners into trucks as quickly as possible, using whatever means necessary. From accounts of the operations, force was obviously authorized. The Operation Keelhaul documents state that shooting to kill was authorized to effect a successful mission.

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[176] Lester Heitlinger, interview.

By handling matters this way, Washington gained control of a situation that had been spinning out of control. The specially trained troops were given a mission and no opportunity to judge the justness of that mission. The soldiers in the camps who stood back and watched the operations were undoubtedly relieved that they did not have to do the "dirty work." While they may not have liked what was taking place, they must have felt they it no longer had their right to complain about a job they were no longer required to do.

This new approach was successful from a government standpoint. The final operations were carried out without much resistance from either the military or the prisoners, and with no press attention. Just as the military had found a way to get around their orders, so Washington had found a way to get around military resistance and carry out its policy to the end.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The soldier, be he friend or foe, is charged with the protection of the weak and unarmed. It is the very essence and reason of his being . . . [a] sacred trust.

General Douglas McArthur

For nearly three years the British and U.S. Governments carried out a policy which was abhorrent to their peoples' tradition and moral values. The policy makers who backed the decision to carry out the policy have claimed that they had no choice in the matter - that they were bound by their Agreement and constrained by the political climate of the times.

The military did not see it that way. As the ones who had to carry out the policy, they knew beyond a doubt that it was wrong. Although also bound by a commitment, they acted within the limits of their military obligation to inject an element of humanity into the barbarity of their task.

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Hoover Archives, Stanford University

***Operation Keelhaul File 383.7-14.1,* National Archives, Washington, DC**

The Operation Keelhaul files were declassified in 1976. However, because Operation Keelhaul was a joint U.S.-British operation, either government maintains the right to enforce a ban on releasing any of the material contained within the file. Therefore, much of the material remains classified or unavailable due to a British ban on portions of the files.

However, the available files are particularly valuable for their detailing of the Repatriation Screening Board results conducted during Operation Keelhaul. It is obvious from the interrogation sheets that the Boards were used to exempt many personnel eligible for repatriation as per McNarney-Clark.

Julius Epstein "Operation Keelhaul" holdings

Julius Epstein wrote the first book (in English) to come out on the subject of the post-World War II forced repatriation of Soviet refugees. His research holdings are available at the Hoover Archives at Stanford University. These files contain an after-action report for Operation Eastwind, written by a British Officer, which provides a very frank accounting of the operation as well as various refugee accounts of the repatriation operations.

Interviews

Lester Heitlinger - Mr. Heitlinger was an ex-GI who served in Normandy right after the D-Day invasion. He was assigned to a DP center for Soviet citizens who had been forced laborers in Germany.

Ambassador Rodney Minott - Ambassador Minott served in Japan at the end of the War. He was assigned to repatriation duty which included the repatriation of White Russians. He later served in Europe as an officer.

Zvonko Springer - Mr. Springer was a Croatian soldier who led his battalion in the surrender to Tito's forces after the British refused to grant the Croatian Army asylum. Mr. Springer is on of the few survivors of Tito's death march which ended in the massacre at Bleiburg.

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